

# the weekly Standard

NOVEMBER 19, 2018 • \$5.99

## WAVE GOODBYE TO THE HOUSE

...and other  
consequences  
of the midterm  
elections





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COVER BY THOMAS FLUHARTY

# Vegan Season

An item in the press recently caught the attention of our friend and colleague P.J. O'Rourke, who emailed to SCRAPBOOK HQ his always amusing reaction. The offending item was this, from the *Washington Post*:

British "MasterChef" critic and magazine editor William Sitwell is battling backlash over a comment he made about "killing vegans, one by one." BuzzFeed reported that Sitwell, the editor of Waitrose Food magazine, made the statement in an email to freelance writer Selene Nelson, who had pitched a series on plant-based cooking. In his response, Sitwell reportedly wrote to her: "How about a series on killing vegans, one by one. Ways to trap them? . . . Force-feed them meat?"

"Waitrose," P.J. writes, "can only be commended for terminating William Sitwell's employment. As an avid outdoorsman who has for many years enjoyed fishing, hunting, upland shooting, and other such activities, I find Sitwell's comments to be deeply offensive.

"First, there is his cavalier attitude toward conservationism. Sitwell seems to be implying that vegans should be made extinct. It is the first responsibility of every hunter to preserve—indeed to propagate—the species and to conserve its habitat

as well. It is imperative that vegans should thrive. We must ensure, by law if necessary—and certainly, one hopes, with the enthusiastic cooperation of victualling firms such as Waitrose—that the bland, dull vegetation upon which vegans feed is sufficiently nutritious. And the unprepossessing environs where vegans seek shelter



and make their dens, those seeming wastelands that are so vulnerable to gentrification and other forms of commercial exploitation, must be safeguarded by strict zoning regulations. Population levels need to be sustained. Firm limits have to be imposed on the vegan cull, with only males past breeding age to be taken. Too little is currently known about vegan wildlife biology. The subject requires study. For example, 'Can they be bred in captivity?' We do not know.

"Second, Sitwell is manifestly

unsportsmanlike. He proposes to trap vegans. It's a cruel practice under the best of circumstances. The more so for a quarry that can be so easily lured into any snare with sugary treats. A mere line of traps! Where is the brilliant dog work, the brave horsemanship, the skill of the cast, or the fine art of gunning in such a thing as that? Where the joys of the chase for pursuer or pursued?

"Third, and most 'distasteful,' as it were, is Sitwell's plan to force-feed meat to vegans. It is a well-known principle to anyone who is serious about the culinary preparation of game: 'Creatures that lust after flesh are a shame at the table.' There are exceptions for certain omnivores, such as the bear, the meat of which can make a delicious stew if properly marinated. And shark fin is very good. But the general rule surely holds true in the case of vegans. They are far too lean already and a diet of animal protein would make them only more stringy, tough, and hard to digest. Rather, I would suggest field corn and other starchy feed to improve the marbling of the meat.

"All right-thinking people should roundly condemn William Sitwell and applaud the proprietors of Waitrose for ending his untoward editorship of a food magazine." ♦

## Except for All the Others

Lots of books on politics come across THE SCRAPBOOK's desk, and most, if we may speak with brutal honesty, aren't to our liking. Often we can't even make it past the titles. You know the ones we mean. *Grand Theft: How a Band of Know-Nothing Media Magnates Is Stealing Your Liberties—and What You*



*Can Do About It! . . . Jackboot: The Coming Authoritarian Nightmare and How to Avoid It. . . Uncivil Liberties: Why It's Time to Take the Fight to the Partisans Corrupting Your Democracy.*

A felicitous variation on this tendency toward abrasive titles came to us a few weeks ago: *Politicians: The Worst Kind of People to Run the Government, Except for All the Others.* The author is Bruce K. Chapman, founder and chairman of the board

of the Discovery Institute in Seattle. Chapman, to sum up his wise and elegantly written book, thinks politicians get a bad rap.

With the election of Donald Trump, a fair number of transatlantic commentators and academics began publishing books and articles that question our attachment to republican democracy itself. Maybe, these writers have suggested, we're better off with some form of enlightened state run by technocratic mandarins. Look what happens when you allow people to vote—you get Trump!

IMAGES: TWS ART / BIGSTOCK



Chapman asks us to go back to the Founders, who anticipated every one of these complaints. The problem with our politics, he thinks, isn't that we have so many politicians—their number hardly grows at all—but that we have so much of everything else.

We have lots and lots of what he calls “middlemen,” the nonpoliticians who have a great deal of influence over public policy but who aren't accountable to voters: lobbyists, activists, consultants, pollsters, bureaucrats, political journalists. These people treat politicians so unfairly—criticizing their every move as if it's a sign of civilizational collapse, attacking their legitimacy, ridiculing them as idiots and liars—as to make them paranoid and unable to speak and act candidly. “The one thing all middlemen have in common,” Chapman writes, “is the exercise of political power outside the restraints of representative government. They borrow from the authority within the system, whether they acknowledge the debt or not.” Speaking as quasi-political commentators ourselves—that is, middlemen—we can only say: Ouch!

But of course *THE SCRAPBOOK* endeavors to treat the politicians with whom we disagree with fairness and good humor. Sometimes they try our patience, but we'll take them over mandarins every time. ♦

## Humblebrags of the Rich and Famous

**T**HE *SCRAPBOOK* assumes most of our readers stay well away from the *New York Times* Style section. That abstention is usually a wise one, but reading the Style pages has its joys, too. We think especially of the long, glowing profiles of rich people. These pieces are satisfying, not because their content enlightens or edifies, but because they reveal what drives modern liberalism.

Consider Jacob Bernstein's recent piece on the philanthropist and art collector Agnes Gund, “Park Avenue's Fairy Godmother,” according to the headline. What readers really want is a Robin Leach-style peek



POST BLUE WAVE

into the life of an Upper East Side billionaire: How much did those designer shoes cost? What would that Jackson Pollock in the kitchen go for today? But Bernstein, his readers, and Gund herself know that that sort of gauche gawker is not permissible in the left-liberal wonderland that is high society Manhattan. Instead, the writer, while mentioning Gund's social connections and possessions here and there, reminds us again and again how much money she gives to liberal

causes—even to the point of depleting her bank account! “Her cash reserve has shrunk after a lifetime of giving to AIDS research, abortion rights groups and arts organizations, among many others,” Bernstein writes (although we're not told to what level her cash reserve has shrunk).



No fawning, please: humble Ms. Gund

Gund isn't like Stephen Schwarzman and David Koch, with their “right-wing political leanings,” whose philanthropic gifts are mainly for capital improvements at museums and opera houses

instead of “art, books and after-school programs.” She is “the good witch of Park Avenue,” the “torch-bearer for the obligation of the rich in an era dominated by vanity and hypocrisy.” Bernstein’s need to venerate the woman is so intense that he sometimes doesn’t quite make sense. “Although Ms. Gund is a die-hard progressive whose pocketbook is a virtual A.T.M. for Democratic politicians, there is a regal, almost atavistic quality to her.” Okee-dokey.

The best parts of the profile, though, are the bits where Bernstein insists she’s humble. Because rich people, if they’ve any hope of redemption in this rarefied world, must at least appear humble. “Her disinclination to speak about herself is at the heart of why people clamor to celebrate her,” Bernstein explains, and she is “patently uncomfortable accepting awards.” Sure, Gund is the “reluctant subject of a new documentary”—*reluctant!*—and every year she sends out a Christmas card bearing a portrait of herself (“photographers like Annie Leibovitz and Lyle Ashton Harris take the portrait”) . . . but man is she humble. Not like those nouveau riche Koch boys.

Wealthy but pretending to be otherwise, vain but feigning humility, ultra-privileged but bankrolling politicians dedicated to removing privilege—it’s quite a glimpse into the cultural contradictions of modern liberalism. Although if you’re not willing to wade through the *Times* Style section just to find such glimpses, we don’t blame you. ♦

## Smokey Bear

**W**e are pro-smoking here at THE SCRAPBOOK. We do not smoke ourselves, and to be honest the smell of stale cigarette smoke makes us gag, but we viscerally disapprove of the way in which nicotine users have been browbeaten, shamed, and hounded out of polite society over the last several decades.

How refreshing to find, then, in the latest London *Spectator*, evidence that smoking can save your life. It’s true.

The magazine’s associate editor Rod Liddle explains:

I almost got killed this week. I went for a very early morning walk in a New Hampshire forest, in the icy rain. Black coat, black hood, black trousers. And so the hunter saw this hunched, awkward, shambling black beast, stumbling over sodden logs, and immediately raised his rifle to his eye and cocked the trigger. One thing, and one thing only, saved me. The armed cracker, looking through his telescopic lens, thought to himself: ‘Hey, it’s a bear—but it’s . . . smoking a cigarette.’ And so, at the last second, refrained from pulling the trigger.

Of course, the liberal scolds’ answer to Liddle’s claim that smoking saved his life is that guns must be taken away, too. No smoking, no guns, everybody’s safe. Except that if you tromp around in the forests of New Hampshire in autumn without a gun, you might be eaten by a bear. Maybe we should get rid of bears, too. ♦

## Sentences We Didn’t Finish

**A**fter listening to a piece about politics on NPR, Robert Hill, 43, quit his job as an events planner in California wine country and moved to Ohio to volunteer for Danny O’Connor, a Democrat running in . . . ” (“To Chase a Political Moment, Intrepid Volunteers Put Their Lives on Hold,” *New York Times*, November 6). ♦



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## Feedback Mania

‘T here is only one valid definition of a business purpose: to create a customer,” the business writer Peter Drucker once said. One of the great things about capitalism is its concern with pleasing the customer, but in recent years this concern has gotten out of hand. Nowadays almost every transaction triggers a customer survey. The words I have come to dread are: “We would appreciate your feedback.”

Here are two examples of feedback mania. I spent two minutes getting a state map from AAA, but this transaction triggered a survey that would require at least ten minutes to fill out. I was out of checks, so I ordered them online, but when the checks arrived there was also a postcard asking me ten questions about my ordering experience.

In both cases the transaction took less time than it would take to fill out the survey about the transaction.

The other day I went to the supermarket to buy a dozen items. The checkout person circled a number on my receipt—telling me that if I entered this number on the supermarket’s website and answered a few questions I could win \$500 in groceries. I didn’t pursue it.

A week ago I got the following request for feedback from my pension fund. “As part of our long-standing commitment to providing participants with the best possible service, — would like to get feedback from you to help us make improvements in the service we provide to you.” How would I know what suggestions to give?

The weirdest request for feedback was from a bank I had called to pay a credit card bill. I was talking to

an automated system, so why would they want feedback? Did they want to know what I thought of their robot? I didn’t respond, but I could have said “Your robot is hard of hearing,” because the robot twice said: “I’m sorry, I didn’t understand you.”

Sometimes providing feedback triggers a second request for feedback. I answered a survey about a gas

**We’d appreciate your feedback about this column.**

Please select all responses that apply.

- ☐ I like it as it is.
- ☐ It is too short.
- ☐ It is too long.
- ☐ It needs better editing.
- ☐ It is too rambling.
- ☐ It is unclear.
- ☐ I wish the writer were a woman.
- ☒ This illustration is too ‘meta.’

station where I took my car for its Virginia state inspection. Filling out this survey led to a request for feedback about my opinion of the car I owned. I didn’t respond.

I usually delete requests for feedback that are based on transactions that took only a few minutes, but when a business does extensive work for me I respond to the request for feedback. A contractor whom I hired through Home Depot did a good job renovating our kitchen. He asked me to give him the highest ratings because otherwise Home Depot would drop him. So of course I did.

Often feedback questions are difficult to answer. If I visit a doctor, I always get a question: Was the receptionist courteous and attentive to your

needs? I have no idea what my needs are. As far as courtesy goes, I grew up in New York so if the receptionist doesn’t shout at me I think she is courteous. Sometimes a survey asks about the cleanliness of the office. Are you kidding? When I enter an office I don’t wipe my hands on a piece of furniture to see if it’s dusty.

A few months ago I went to my doctor for a checkup—now called a wellness exam. My doctor belongs to a large not-for-profit medical organization that puts a premium on efficiency, so my exam takes only a half-hour, which includes a blood test. Many people dislike this new brand of computer-driven medicine, but I like it. No long stays in the waiting room, and I get my blood test results online in 24 hours. But then they sent me a request for feedback. I like my doctor and I worried that if I didn’t respond someone might conclude I wasn’t fully satisfied with him. So I gave him the highest rating. It didn’t end there. A few weeks later I got another survey—I think it was from Medicare—asking me what I thought of my “health provider.”

I once responded to a feedback request from the dealership that services my car by saying that I was satisfied with everything except their request for feedback. “If I have a problem I’ll get back to you,” I wrote. Despite my plea for no more requests for feedback, they continue to send them.

I dislike giving feedback, but the knowledge that there will be feedback may motivate employees to be attentive and polite. In the 1970s I went to Communist Hungary several times—my wife was born there—and the store clerks were often sullen and unhelpful, sometimes even nasty. They knew they couldn’t be fired.

So let a thousand feedback requests bloom—just don’t expect me to answer most of them.

STEPHEN MILLER



# Bull Sessions

*The earliest supporter: Attorney General Jeff Sessions listens to the president last March.*

**T**he message was worded, as these messages often are, in the first-person plural—the royal “we”: “We are pleased to announce that Matthew G. Whitaker, Chief of Staff to Attorney General Jeff Sessions at the Department of Justice, will become our new Acting Attorney General of the United States. He will serve our Country well. We thank Attorney General Jeff Sessions for his service, and wish him well! A permanent replacement will be nominated at a later date.”

At last, after almost two years of hectoring from the White House and speculation from everywhere else, Sessions will leave the Trump administration.

Jeff Sessions was among the earliest public officials to embrace Donald Trump’s populist message. The Alabama senator was an America Firster from the beginning and became a formal adviser to the presidential candidate. In his confirmation hearing in January 2017, he was asked if he had ever had any communications with Russians during the campaign, and he said he had not. But, as he clarified two months later, he had in fact had two conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergey Kislyak: once briefly after a speech in Washington and again in a meeting with two members of his staff in the course of his work on the Hill. He denied that these meetings had anything to do with the election and insisted he did not intend to mislead the Senate.

It was a mess of his own making. Either through faulty or selective memory, Sessions had made himself a compromised if minor figure in an ongoing FBI investigation into Trump campaign officials and their interactions with Russians—primarily Michael Flynn, who had communicated with Russian officials and then lied about it. As the newly confirmed attorney general, Sessions was in charge of the Justice Department, which was conducting the investigation into a campaign in which he had taken part.

So, in an announcement on March 2, 2017, he began by noting that in his confirmation hearings he had promised, “If a specific matter arose where I believe my impartiality might reasonably be questioned, I would consult with the Department ethics officials regarding the most appropriate way to proceed.” Sessions said he had done so and that his staff recommended that the most appropriate thing he could do is recuse himself.

“They said that since I had involvement with the campaign, I should not be involved in any campaign investigation,” he announced. “I have studied the rules and considered their comments and evaluation. I believe those recommendations are right and just. Therefore I have recused myself in the matters that deal with the Trump campaign.”

It was a principled move, and the proper one. The recusal ought to have been seen by Trump as helping him. The media and Democrats were ready to bury Sessions over the

SPENCER PLATT/GETTY

lapses in his confirmation testimony. He has always been an institutionalist and a believer in the value of procedure. Sessions's recusal removed a potent source of criticism of the investigation into possible interference in the election. His act was in the president's interest.

Trump, of course, didn't see it that way. He wanted to fight the investigation, which he was eager to portray as a sham assault on his legitimacy. As early as February 2017, according to James Comey's congressional testimony, Trump asked the then-FBI director to "let this thing go" with Flynn. Comey described Sessions "lingering" after Trump had asked everyone to leave the room so he could meet with the FBI director privately. He later asked Sessions never to leave him alone with Trump again.

By recusing himself, Sessions had signaled his opposition to Trump's spurning of the Russia investigation. If the president was going to threaten the independence of the Justice Department—something Sessions and other Republicans had rightly criticized Barack Obama and Eric Holder for doing—then Sessions wasn't going to make it easy for him. The move angered the president and, as time went on, clearly ate at him. His irritation became acute when Rod Rosenstein, Sessions's deputy and the person in charge of the FBI's Russia investigation, empowered a special counsel, Robert Mueller, to oversee a broader investigation into Russia's involvement with the Trump campaign.

Whatever one suspects about Trump's or his campaign's "collusion" with the Russians, this much is plain: Trump thought Sessions's top priority should be to protect Trump, and Sessions thought the institution under his care mattered most. Trump thought Sessions should behave like a corner-cutting Manhattan real-estate attorney; Sessions thought he should behave like the head of

the Department of Justice. The attorney general's scrupulousness angered Trump not just because in his view it caused a lot of trouble, but also, perhaps especially, because Sessions was one of the few senior Republicans truly loyal to the president's agenda. Sessions was the ultimate immigration restrictionist, a trade protectionist, a tough-on-crime law-enforcer.

But he failed Trump where it mattered most—personal loyalty. Sessions became a whipping boy, the president alternately questioning his judgment in public and berating him on Twitter. Sessions offered to resign, according to the *New York Times*, but Trump declined, and the A.G. wouldn't go on his own. True believer but institutionalist, empowered but insulted, Sessions stuck to his guns until the end.

A president has every right to fire his attorney general and hire another more to his liking. But in this instance, as Trump knows well, the acting attorney general has not recused himself from the Mueller probe and has repeatedly questioned its legitimacy. The Justice Department has announced that Whitaker will now oversee the Mueller investigation rather than Rosenstein. There are serious questions about just how he will do this.

Trump critics charged immediately that he was replacing Sessions with Whitaker in order to put a more manageable subordinate between himself and Mueller. The president has provided ample evidence to support such a conclusion, demonstrating throughout his presidency a readiness to subvert the rule of law in favor of the rule of Trump. If this is one of these instances, it will soon become obvious to everybody—and the president will have revealed himself once again to be the reckless fool his harshest critics have always alleged he is.

He is not a king. ♦

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## The Center Holds

**T**he midterm elections were a draw, with both sides able to make claims of victory. The Republicans bolstered their majority in the Senate, thanks largely to the Democrats' shameful treatment of Brett Kavanaugh. The Democrats took the House, cutting off any chance that the GOP will pass major legislation in the next two years. Twelve Houses races are still unofficial, but the Dems have gained more than 30 seats and a solid majority. They had a good night, but it still wasn't quite the wave they promised.

One consequential outcome is that Democrats picked up seven governorships: Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Kansas, Nevada, New Mexico, and Maine. The Democrats now occupy 23 governor's mansions, to the Repub-

licans' 27. That's an impressive achievement for a party that has struggled to win statehouse and governor's races for a generation.

The long-term effect has been to deprive the Democratic party of capable leaders from places that aren't dominated by liberal metropolitan populations. All the party's likely 2020 presidential contenders come from California or the Northeast: Cory Booker from New Jersey, Kamala Harris from California, Elizabeth Warren from Massachusetts, and Bernie Sanders from Vermont. Where is the Democrats' next Bill Clinton?

Leave aside the man's shameful personal behavior and recall that, as a second-wave "New Democrat," he promoted centrist policies in ways that almost nobody in today's



Democratic party is willing to do. He was able to do this, at least in part, because he was not from New York or California but Arkansas. He understood the outlooks and worries of people in flyover country—a talent his wife, for one, never cultivated. And for all the 42nd president's intermittent liberalism in domestic affairs and starry-eyed multilateralism abroad, he pushed his party to acknowledge realities it prefers to forget: the dangers of welfare dependency, the necessity of spending priorities, the need for robust crime-prevention policies, the electoral folly of embracing progressive social issues.

Just as it's an ominous thing for the GOP to fall into the hands of harebrained populists fixated on immigration and voter fraud, so it augurs nothing good that the Democratic leadership has shed most of its moderates in the last few years.

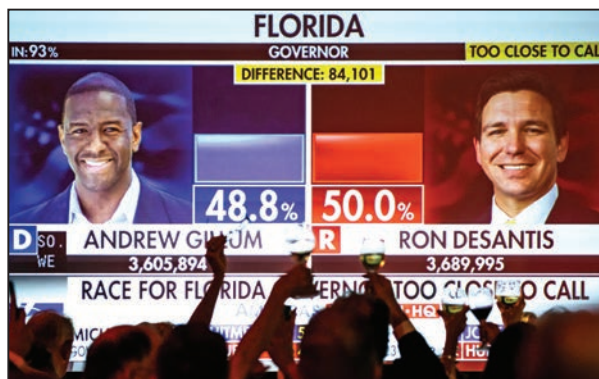
That leads us to the 2018 gubernatorial races. The Dems' seven pickups conspicuously did not include Flor-

ida, in which the Bernie Sanders-aligned progressive Andrew Gillum lost to Ron DeSantis, or Georgia, where the aggressively left-wing romance novelist and former state representative Stacey Abrams fell short against Brian Kemp.

Where Democrats ran as moderates, by contrast, they mostly prevailed. In Kansas, Democrat Laura Kelly defeated populist rabble-rouser Kris Kobach. Kelly campaigned on traditional Democratic issues—school funding, infrastructure spending, social welfare spending—and largely avoided the culture-war absurdities. She won the endorsement of an impres-

sive array of Republicans in the legislature, and she won the election.

In Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, a former prosecutor and state senator, won in much the same way. Whitmer is a liberal—she favors a \$15 minimum wage, vastly increased spending on an unreformed school system, and the repeal



*A photo finish in—no surprise—Florida*

## New Opportunities for Bipartisanship

**THOMAS J. DONOHUE**

PRESIDENT AND CEO  
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The results of last week's election are in—Americans delivered a split decision on the makeup of the next Congress. In the House, Democrats won control from the Republicans and now hold the majority. In the Senate, Republicans maintained power and even added seats to their majority. This means that we'll be operating under divided government for the next two years. But it doesn't mean that nothing will get done.

Throughout our history, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has worked with all types of majorities to advance a pro-growth policy agenda. We've notched wins with Congress under Republican control, under Democrat control, and everything in between.

Even in today's hyper-partisan environment, there are still areas where consensus exists in the middle. And we're calling on our new and reelected leaders from both parties to claim that

middle ground and reject the extremes on both sides. We will work with Democrats and Republicans to focus on the art of the possible—those issues that are most likely to attract bipartisan support and the president's signature.

Here are two examples of priorities that are ripe for progress.

First, infrastructure. Members on both sides of the aisle have long agreed on the need to modernize the physical platform of our economy. They'll have to make some trade-offs, but there is a real chance to finally do it. Republicans are going to have to accept that we need more revenue from dedicated user fees. Democrats are going to have to accept that private investment must be a big part of the solution. Both sides should look at this as an investment in our nation's long-term competitiveness and future prosperity.

Second, immigration, which can help address our nation's worker shortage. Employers must be able to hire the workers they need at every skill level—when and where they need them. So we

must fix America's broken immigration system. If lawmakers find the middle ground, work through the tough issues, and finally address this long-simmering challenge, they will help solve the people gap in our country and reaffirm our legacy of welcoming the world's best talent and hardest workers.

We'll also push our leaders to strengthen the U.S. workforce, adopt smart trade policies, advance energy, and support other pro-growth priorities. We'll fight against efforts to roll back important policy gains from the previous two years, including tax reform and regulatory relief. Unraveling those policies would undermine our economy.

The bottom line is that while the composition of Congress may change, our objectives never do. We're focused on working with both political parties to push for policies that grow the American economy, create good jobs, and advance free enterprise.



Learn more at  
[uschamber.com/abovethefold](https://uschamber.com/abovethefold).

of Michigan's new right-to-work law—but she, too, shows little interest in the social liberalism with which Harris, Warren, and Co. are obsessed. During the campaign, Whitmer talked about fixing roads and balancing the state budget more than anything else, and she favors repealing a tax on pensions that her term-limited Republican predecessor, Rick Snyder, signed.

In Nevada, voters plumped for Democrat Steve Sisolak over Republican attorney general Adam Laxalt. Sisolak based his appeal almost exclusively on education spending, Chamber of Commerce-style economic boosterism, and Democratic boilerplate on health care. He has clashed with unions and sharply criticized corporate welfare giveaways. If it weren't for the D after his name, you would have a hard time pegging Sisolak as a liberal Republican or a conservative Democrat.

Democratic moderates are thriving elsewhere. Gina Raimondo won a second term in Rhode Island. In her first term she cut regulations and lowered both the car tax and the corporate tax. In her previous job as state treasurer, she reformed the Rhode Island pension system.

At the national level, Democrats have gone from disappointment to disappointment. Their congressional leaders are progressive loudmouths bereft of any idea except opposing Trump. For their own good and the nation's, the party's voters should look to the governor's mansions. ♦

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## The Talib Across the Table

**T**he Obama administration's decision in 2014 to trade five imprisoned Taliban fighters for Bowe Bergdahl, the deserter captured by Afghan insurgents, continues to spawn ill consequences.

A quick review: The "Taliban Five" were U.S. detainees held in Guantánamo Bay until 2014. All had been high-ranking members of the pre-9/11 Afghan government that protected Osama bin Laden. All had direct ties to al Qaeda and other terror groups. And all were considered by U.S. intelligence agencies risks to the United States and its interests—several considered "high" risks. Against the pleas of top officials in the Pentagon and the CIA, Barack Obama chose to release the Taliban Five from detention and deliver them to Doha, Qatar, in exchange for Bergdahl.

A year earlier, the Obama administration had agreed to recognize the Taliban's political office in Doha. Among the stipulations: The office was not to represent the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," since that was the name of the government the United States overthrew in late 2001. So when

the Taliban's Doha office opened in 2013, it called itself the representative of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan." The Taliban has never had any intention of engaging in good-faith negotiations with the United States.

Five years later, the Trump administration is as eager as its predecessor to get out of Afghanistan. The Pentagon speaks of "ending" the war rather than winning it, and the president himself shows little interest in the theater outside of departure. The administration recently appointed Zalmay Khalilzad as envoy to broker a peace between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

That's the same criminal junta we toppled in 2001 because it was aiding and harboring Osama bin Laden, a group that enforced *sharia* law, barred girls from attending school, terrorized the Afghan populace, and routinely executed political opponents and anyone deemed insufficiently pious.

There can be no meaningful peace settlement with the Taliban, and there is little indication that the group's leaders want an agreement. In October, a Kandahar meeting between American and Afghan military officials was attacked by gunmen. Afghan general Abdul Raziq was killed in the attack, as were two other Afghans; American personnel were injured, too. The Taliban enthusiastically claimed responsibility. Such attacks are common. This is the group with whom the Trump administration expects Afghanistan's democratically elected government to negotiate.



*Our interlocutors: Taliban detainees in Jalalabad, earlier this year*

Now the final insulting irony: In early November, a Taliban spokesman announced that the Taliban Five were joining the group's political office in Doha. The group already had the upper hand in the ongoing negotiations, realizing how desperate the Americans are to leave. The fact that their political office now includes these five terrorists is just rubbing our noses in it.

A little more than a year ago, President Trump announced an aggressive and realistic plan to win the war in Afghanistan without leaving precipitously and creating a vacuum for terrorist insurgencies to fill. That is what the United States did in Iraq in 2011, he warned, and "We cannot repeat in Afghanistan the mistake our leaders made in Iraq," for the consequences would be catastrophic. He was right. ♦

NOORULLAH SHIRZADA / AFP / GETTY



FRED BARNES

# The biggest winner: Senator Mitch McConnell

Republicans lost the House but held the Senate in the midterm election. That puts Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell in the catbird seat.

After a bumpy start, he gets along smoothly with President Trump. He doesn't need the House to pursue his top priority, filling the federal courts with conservative judges. In the past two years, 84 have been confirmed to lower courts and 2 to the Supreme Court—an impressive record.

Democrats were slow to react as the White House, McConnell, and Chairman Chuck Grassley of the Senate Judiciary Committee built a political juggernaut for nominating and confirming judges, most in their 40s and early 50s.

Now Democrats are terrified as they watch the courts slip away. They ought to be. It takes only a simple majority to confirm a federal judge, and the election made that task easier. Republicans added two or three new senators. This allows for some slippage.

But they may not need any. "It's a simple fact that there isn't much Republican consensus on a legislative agenda," David French writes in *National Review*. "There is enormous consensus and resolve around the federal judiciary."

McConnell hasn't even finished the parade of nominees for this year. More will be voted on in the lame duck session of Congress next month. Chances are, they'll be approved. Republicans have a multitude of young conservative jurists, law professors, and lawyers with dazzling résumés to choose from.

They're not letting up. They intend to "keep confirming as many

as we possibly can for as long as we're in a position to do it," McConnell told reporters the day after the midterm. "Next Congress as well."

That he works well with Trump puts McConnell at the top of a small class of senators, along with Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Tom Cotton of Arkansas, and—well, I can't think of others. The president doesn't



**Democrats were slow to react to the new political juggernaut for nominating and confirming judges. Now Democrats are terrified as they watch the courts slip away. They ought to be.**

make it easy to be in his good graces.

McConnell and Trump are an example of political opposites attracting. McConnell doesn't reveal much, even to GOP associates. Trump broadcasts his every thought. McConnell is patient. Trump is impatient. McConnell is proud but not boastful. Trump all but waves an index finger to declare, "I'm number one."

The key is McConnell's pragmatism and political skill. It took a while, but Trump eventually learned he needs what McConnell has. McConnell allows little to get in the way of winning. Conservatives who insist on pushing right-wing issues with no chance of passage find little favor with him. His close advisers are team players, senators like Roy Blunt of Missouri.

One of the majority leader's rules of thumb is that divided government offers unique opportunities for compromise on big issues that otherwise would go nowhere. Thus, it's not surprising that he wants to get a grip on out-of-control spending on entitlements.

This puts him at odds with Trump. In the 2016 campaign, Trump made it clear he opposed cutting Social Security and Medicare. When a senior White House adviser recently pleaded with him to trim those programs, he wouldn't back down. He said the no-cuts pledge was an unbreakable promise.

At his press conference, McConnell sounded like he isn't ready to press the issue. It would be defensible were he to conclude entitlement reform is, for now, like one of those right-wing issues that can't pass. But he doesn't appear to think so. With House speaker Paul Ryan retiring, McConnell will be the only major figure in Washington who harps on entitlements and debt. It's a lonely role.

McConnell's theory about divided government is based on the notion of shared pain. Neither party wants to champion "reform" of Social Security on its own, especially after President George W. Bush tried and failed following reelection in 2004. Bush's effort attracted practically no one in either party.

Here's what McConnell said when Democrats took over Congress in 2007:

I've been challenging the new Democratic majority not just to do the easy things . . . but let's do some important things and I think there are two things that are very significant that would make a difference for the country. Let's fix the immigration problem. And let's save Social Security.

I think it can only happen with divided government. That is, one party in the White House and another party in Congress. Divided government is the only way you can kind of share the blame for doing big things. . . . We need to fix Social

Security and the best time to do that is when you have divided government.

Should Republicans and Democrats agree to push together to take on entitlements, neither party would have a political advantage. A backlash by voters would hit both. Acting alone would be too risky.

Since Republicans gained seats, the midterm marked another McConnell victory over Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer. That wasn't all. Schumer had led

the Democratic effort to block the confirmation of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. It not only failed but turned into a Democratic disaster.

The political impact of persecuting Kavanaugh was enormous. It aroused Republican voters to charge into the campaign. McConnell said it was like a shot of intensity. It led to yet another defeat for Schumer.

And it put McConnell in the catbird seat. By the way, that means he has the upper hand over his rivals. ♦

COMMENT ♦ MATT LABASH

## All hail the Mayor of North Beach

**T**his Election Day, like every Election Day, I entered the sanctum sanctorum of the voting cubicle, searched my conscience, remembered that I'd left it in the car, then voted for my own amusement. This time, I pulled the lever for a state-senatorial longshot named Jesse Peed. It felt exciting and dangerous—"Jesse Peed" being not so much a name as an accusation.

But voting scatologically isn't my most hallowed Election Day tradition. That would be riding with my former brother-in-law, Mike Benton. He might have quit my wife's sister 25 years ago, but he's no quitter. Every four years since 2002, he runs for something in our exurban Maryland county, to mixed results, which I then detail in these pages.

I've cataloged how Mike was tossed from grocery stores while campaigning without permission, how he ate the candy left by rival politicians on door hangers, how he held signs along the highway in fingerless gloves, leaving his middle digit free to respond

to detractors. I stood with Mike when he was stomped like a grape for both county commissioner and clerk of the court. I drank champagne with Mike—or at least Natty Bohs (the



**Raised by his grandmother on 200 bucks a month, Mike remembers crawling under the house to warm up frozen pipes with a hairdryer in order to wash up for school.**

local champagne of beers)—when he cruised to victory for two terms as a town councilman. A realtor now and former life coach (Zig Ziglar is Mike's North Star), he has set his sights higher than ever this year. Mike is running for mayor of North Beach, the once-working-class hamlet of watermen and bikers now rapidly gentrifying as a tourism hotspot along the Chesapeake Bay.

"I'm a beacher," Mike says with civic pride, having grown up here during dodgier times both for the now-family-friendly town ("If you went to a local bar back then, there was a chance you'd have to fight your way out") as well as himself. Raised by his grandmother on 200 bucks a month in a cottage that he now owns as a renovated rental, Mike remembers crawling under the house to warm up frozen pipes with a hairdryer in order to wash up for school.

As we duck into our favorite dive bar two days before the election, along with Mike's campaign manager, Panda (nicknamed after *South Park*'s "Sexual Harassment Panda"), I remind Mike how much things have changed since we began this quadrennial odyssey. Since 2002, we've both had new kids, and he has a new wife. Back then, social media didn't exist, video stores did. I ask Mike how he's changed.

"I drink less," the hard-charging former Marine says, ordering his fifth Irish Mule of the night. He's on a Jameson kick lately after DNA-testing. He found out he's 51 percent Irish, along with being German and ".0008 percent Jewish . . . which is why I'm going to let you buy everything tonight." Political correctness was never Mike's strong suit. A compassionate conservative who used to job-coach down-on-their-luckers at the local unemployment office, Mike was Trump before Trump, though the president has sort of stolen his mojo. Saying whatever was on your mind used to be the province of fringe candidates. Now, it's just the province of candidates.

On Election Day, Mike is a raw nerve. Usually gregarious and care-free, he snaps at Panda for yelling at a motorist who nearly mows us down in a crosswalk as we campaign outside the town council building, which doubles as a polling place. Panda was just protecting me as we made a "refreshments" run to my car—I recently had knee surgery and am hobbling around in a brace, making this year's election the Battle of Wounded Knee to the Benton camp. Mike yells that we only have two hours left, and we should not be alienating potential voters right in



front of his *bête noire's* tent. His fellow councilman and mayoral rival Randy Hummel (who Mike says stopped speaking to him since the mayor's race kicked off) eyes us warily while chain smoking Pall Malls. Team Benton wonders what kind of forward-thinking candidate still smokes in public, as we drink bourbon from open containers.

Panda, who claims he's been fired by Mike no fewer than six times for infractions such as asking Mike why he'd ruin perfectly good whiskey by pouring ginger ale in it, is a rangy, bearded realtor who used to fight wildfires out west. He came to Maryland after getting sick of watching friends die for 16 bucks an hour. I ask Panda how working with Mike compares with fighting fires as part of the Santa Fe Hotshots. "It's the exact same thing," Panda says. "You never know when the wind is gonna shift, and he'll completely freak out or blow up the hill, and you're fighting for your life."

Mike's nervous, he admits. This one matters more. "I'm nervous about losing, I'm nervous about winning. There's 157 mayors in the state of Maryland. I could be one of them. That's a big deal, man." He's got plans for North Beach, but not too big. Because that's always the problem—that's Randy's problem. They welcome the tourists so promiscuously, they forget the townies. They always want to get bigger, instead of just better, serving the people who choose to live there. Still, Mike's series of 90-day plans, scrupulously laid out on his phone, encompasses everything from photographing the town's Christmas-tree lighting with a drone to installing gravity drains on Bay Avenue. Be a global warming denier all you want, Mike says, "but that bitch is rising." The water level of the bay ain't sexy stuff. Just the stuff of governance.

I ask him what he'll do if, as one of North Beach's favorite sons, he loses this popularity contest. "I'm moving to Israel to fight for my people," he vows.

The polls close. We file into the town hall building for the announcement. Mike fretted needlessly. He smokes Randy, 248-191. In a crowded

meeting room, I try to raise his hand in victory, but Mike forces it down. This is no time for touchdown dances. Now his real work begins. Years ago, I used to call Mike "the Mayor of North Beach" as a joke. And he used to joke that he'd be lucky to get elected dog catcher. But now he's the dog who caught the car. The joke is on us.

Mike drinks less at the after-party than I've ever seen him drink in my life. I have no such compunctions, since after all, I'm just one of history's

first-rough-drafters, forever cheering or jeering from the sidelines. But the new mayor of North Beach, Mike Benton, is the man in the arena. "It's easy to say you want to be the man, but once you're the man, well, f—! Now you've got to step up," he says. "It was theoretical, it was hypothetical. But now I'm the mayor of the town that I grew up in as a kid, the town that I love."

Even five Irish Mules down, it's sobering. ♦

COMMENT ♦ PHILIP TERZIAN

## Those legendary Republicans of yore, beloved of the media

My attention was caught last week by an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* written by Chesley B. "Sully" Sullenberger III. Mr. Sullenberger, of course, is the pilot who skillfully maneuvered his disabled airliner to safety on the Hudson River, saving all 155 of its passengers and crew. His essay was not about that famous 2009 incident, however, but about the 2018 midterm elections.

Far be it from me to impugn an American hero who is universally admired and a recipient of the highest honor our society can bestow: an eponymous movie about himself starring Tom Hanks. But I think it's possible that, perhaps, Captain Sully has been on the motivational-speaking circuit a little too long. You had to hack your way through some formidable prose thickets—"The fabric of our nation is under attack . . . Our ideals, shared facts and common humanity are what bind us together as a nation and a people"—and read between a fair number of cryptic lines to get to the gist of his argument: He doesn't like Donald Trump and planned to register his disapproval on Election Day.



Fair enough. The president is scarcely to everyone's taste, and Sullenberger's bill of particulars—"Many [people in power] do not respect the offices they hold; they lack . . . a basic knowledge of history, science and

**Far be it from me to impugn an American hero, but I think it's possible that, perhaps, Captain Sully has been on the motivational-speaking circuit a little too long.**

leadership; and they act impulsively, worsening a toxic political environment"—was carefully worded in ways that could be applied to innumerable "people in power" but was obviously directed at Trump.

What intrigued me about the exercise, however, was the lone paragraph where the author got specific, more or less.

For the first 85 percent of my adult life, I was a registered Republican.

But I have always voted as an American. And this critical Election Day, I will do so by voting for leaders committed to rebuilding our common values and not pandering to our basest impulses.

Sullenberger may have genuinely believed that his account of awakening, conversion, and repentance was a novelty—that is certainly the way it was reported in the press and disseminated on social media—but in the pages of the *Post*, especially, this is one of the oldest and most shopworn reflections on Republicans and their party: namely, the wise, widely respected, and faithful old GOP voter who, more in sorrow than anger, has concluded that the Republican party of 2018—or 2008, or 1992, or 1980, or 1964, or 1952—is no longer the party of his earlier life or of innumerable ancestors.

Indeed, if you live long enough, you begin to notice certain trends in such stories and their evolving succession of names. In the early 1980s, for example, political correspondents were especially adept at finding New England farmers or Midwest businessmen whose first presidential ballots were cast for Calvin Coolidge, say, or Wendell Willkie. But those overbearing ideologues in Ronald Reagan's White House, running up the national debt and pushing the world toward the brink of nuclear war, had persuaded them—sadly, reluctantly—to vote Democratic for the first time in their lives!

By the turn of the 21st century, lifelong Republicans in these perennial tales were more likely to have cast their first votes for Dwight D. Eisenhower or Barry Goldwater—both of whom seem to have retrospectively lost any partisan identity and were, in any case, described in respectful, even nostalgic, terms that would scarcely apply to those divisive, bigoted figures (Bob Dole, George W. Bush, Mitt Romney, John McCain) currently calling themselves “Republican.”

The obvious problem with such selective accounts as these is that in a body politic with a large and malleable “independent” constituency, strict party-line voters tend to be less com-

mon than is widely believed. Moreover, since Republicans have persisted in winning elections on the local, state, and national levels, it's reasonable to guess that for every laconic Vermonter or son of the prairie who used to vote Republican but has now switched sides there is a Georgia shopkeeper or daughter of the Plains who descends from New Deal Democrats but now wants to Make America Great Again.

There have been enormous demographic, geographical, and ideological shifts in American politics—always have been and always will be—but you wouldn't necessarily know it from the press coverage. The suburban Northeast and the Solid South have switched political loyalties; but the youth vote is always on the verge of transforming America, the NRA is no longer omnipotent, and Hispanic voters—or global-warming activists, soccer moms, #BlackLivesMatter—are sleeping giants keeping the GOP awake at night.

Decorated veterans running for office as Republicans are a statistic;

decorated veterans running as Democrats are a feature story. You can read about the disappearance of liberal Republicans on a regular basis but the absence of conservative Democrats escapes notice. Which, after all, is scarcely a surprise when the principal historic reflection in the press on Republican values is its status as “the party of Lincoln.”

To be sure, the fact that Abraham Lincoln was born during the reign of King George III, and that his views on gay marriage, the League of Nations, net neutrality, women's suffrage, Medicaid expansion, and affirmative action are impossible to know, seems no bar to expectations about the party of Lincoln. Yet there is no corresponding media standard by which today's Democrats are judged as the party of Thomas Jefferson or Andrew Jackson.

Perhaps that's what Captain Sullenberger meant when he wrote that “the fabric of our nation is under attack, while shame—a timeless beacon of right and wrong—seems dead.” ♦

COMMENT ♦ MARK HEMINGWAY

## Meanwhile, back at the governors' mansions: It was a good night for the Democrats

Besides losing control of the House last Tuesday, Republicans suffered a blow in gubernatorial elections. The GOP went into the midterms with 33 governors. By the time the dust settles, only 27 will remain.

It could have been even worse for Republicans. Hoping that progressive candidates would achieve Obama-like high turnout rates among minorities and young voters may have cost the Democrats in key races, notably with Andrew Gillum in Florida and Stacey Abrams in Georgia. Both were appealing candidates who garnered lots of national attention and money, and both ran surprisingly close races

in states Trump won. However, they were unabashedly left-wing on issues on which it's unclear that their stances helped more than hurt.

Both were outspoken on gun control in southern states with large rural populations. Abrams had even sponsored a bill in the state legislature that would have required confiscation of so-called “assault weapons” and continued to campaign on such a ban, which would outlaw the most commonly owned rifle in America. Gillum boasted of his endorsement from the Everytown for Gun Safety advocacy group and attended a fundraiser with Sheriff Scott Israel, whose conduct and activism following the Parkland school



shooting were polarizing. It's hard to imagine that their stances on gun control didn't cost them votes, even if they ramped up media attention and out-of-state donations. Similarly, Richard Cordray's reputation as an Elizabeth Warren protégé and progressive darling, from his days as the combative head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, was not the special sauce Ohio voters were looking for in the governor's race there.

And while Abrams and Gillum were minority candidates, that didn't necessarily translate into the needed levels of support from minority voters. According to exit polls, Abrams's opponent, Brian Kemp, got 37 percent of the Hispanic vote in Georgia. And Gillum, who was dogged by corruption charges that he said were motivated by racism, nonetheless seems to have underperformed among black voters, relatively speaking. According to exit polls, Gillum got only 86 percent support among black voters overall and only 82 percent support from black women. With over a million votes in Florida from African Americans, a four or five point increase in support might have made the difference for Gillum.

There were a lot of promising underdogs in gubernatorial elections this cycle, but in the end, national party dynamics seemed to drag incumbents over the finish line. Two weeks before the vote, a Republican pollster expressed genuine surprise to me at internal polls showing GOP candidate Knute Buehler narrowly ahead in deep-blue Oregon and GOP incumbent Kristi Noem losing in red South Dakota. However, despite the fact that Buehler's and Noem's opponents were exceptionally appealing centrist candidates, voter sentiment started to revert to form in the final week's polls, aligning with Oregon's and South Dakota's general partisan orientation on Election Day. In neither state were voters who showed up energized to support their party in congressional

elections willing to suspend that partisanship for the governor's election. The same dynamic seems to explain Republican Bob Stefanowski's narrow loss in Connecticut.

There are exceptions to almost every trend, of course, and three notable Republican governors haven't just managed to buck party dynamics and get elected in blue states—they're shockingly popular to boot. Larry



**There were a lot of promising underdogs in gubernatorial elections this cycle, but in the end, national party dynamics seemed to drag incumbents over the finish line.**

Hogan was reelected in Maryland with a comfortable 56 percent of the vote. What's remarkable is the level of support he got even in the most liberal areas of a liberal state. Hogan got 45 percent of the vote in the D.C. suburbs of Montgomery County, a Democratic stronghold.

Republican Charlie Baker, meanwhile, won reelection in Massachu-

setts in even more impressive fashion, receiving almost 67 percent of the vote. That outpaced Senator Elizabeth Warren, who took 60 percent in her reelection bid. Baker even took a majority of votes in Boston. In Vermont, Republican incumbent Phil Scott won by a whopping 15-point margin.

It's true that Baker, Hogan, and Scott are out of step with the more socially conservative politics of most congressional Republicans, but they do seem to provide a template for Republicans hoping to present a winning alternative in states where Democratic governance is dominant, profligate, and sometimes corrupt. (Knute Buehler cast himself very much in this mold in Oregon, and with the state's metastasizing financial and law and order problems, he may get another bite at the apple.) It's notable that there are no counterparts to Hogan, Baker, and Scott among Democratic governors in solidly red states.

The bigger question remains: Do the Republican gubernatorial losses represent long-term momentum for Democrats at the state level? Or are the midterm results just a reversion to the mean after Democrats' extensive state-level losses during the Obama administration? For now, Republicans still control almost twice as many state legislative chambers as Democrats and can feel good about the fact that their governors seem to represent a more politically diverse group of states. ♦

### **Worth Repeating** from **WeeklyStandard.com**:

Democrats failed to win the House by a landslide margin, and that means that the House majority will likely be at least up for grabs again in 2020. The installation of new Democratic incumbents in marginal House districts will likely erode the GOP's structural advantage a little bit (e.g., a Democratic congressman who gets a three-point incumbency bonus could turn a very lightly red district into a purple one), but the Republicans will probably maintain much of that advantage. So there's a decent chance that the House will be competitive and could easily flip back to Republicans next time around.

—David Byler, *'What 2018 Tells Us About 2020'*

# Bluer Blues, Redder Reds

The winners and losers of 2018.

BY JOHN McCORMACK

In the run-up to the midterms, countless pundits and politicians declared 2018 was “the most important election of our lifetimes.” That wasn’t true. The power of the presidency has grown so great in the modern era that 2018, simply by virtue of not being a presidential election year, probably ranks somewhere in the bottom half in terms of importance.

Of course, 2018 did matter, even if it’s hard to know how it will affect the 2020 presidential election and beyond. Let us count the ways.

## THE HOUSE GOES BLUE.

The Democratic takeover effectively forecloses any conservative legislative victories over the next two years. True, the Republican legislative agenda had been exhausted for several months: They’d already sent the president what legislation could get through the House, could not be filibustered in the Senate, and wasn’t rejected by moderate Republicans in the Senate. With a more conservative Senate, Republicans could’ve made some more legislative gains. Now they can’t. But Trump, like Obama before him, still has his pen and phone.

It’s very unlikely Democrats will get any liberal legislative victories during the next two years, but Democrats did gain the power to investigate and subpoena the executive branch. You only have to look back

a few years to see how subpoena power can hurt the opposing party. It was the House GOP’s investigation of the Benghazi attack that revealed Hillary Clinton was using a private, unsecured email server to conduct government business, and that issue



Scott Walker warns of Democratic policy fallout, November 5.

likely cost her the 2016 election.

On the other hand, the Democratic House could prove to be a useful foil for President Trump in 2020 if Democrats push legislation that is too liberal or if they engage in investigations that spark a backlash (such as impeaching Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh). Again, just consider how Barack Obama ran against the Republican House in 2012. But right now, we really can’t know if the Democratic House will be a net positive or negative for Trump in 2020.

## THE SENATE GETS REDDER.

Moderate Republican senator Dean Heller lost in Nevada, while conservative Republicans

unseated Democrats in three red states: Josh Hawley in Missouri, Kevin Cramer in North Dakota, and Mike Braun in Indiana. As we went to press, it appeared that Republican Rick Scott had unseated Democrat Bill Nelson in Florida. (Scott led by 17,423 votes out of 8 million ballots cast, but a small number of votes remain uncounted and a recount is likely.) In Arizona, Republican Martha McSally was a hair behind with several hundred thousand votes left to be counted. That means Republicans will hold 52 to 54 Senate seats, up from their current 51.

In terms of policy, the most important consequence of the GOP Senate gains is that Republicans will continue to confirm as many federal judges as they can over the next two years. It also creates an opportunity for Republicans to confirm another Supreme Court justice without needing the votes of moderates Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins, should another vacancy open up.

The oldest Republican-appointed Supreme Court justice, Clarence Thomas, has been on the court for nearly three decades, but he will only be 71 next year (still a whippersnapper by Supreme Court standards). Thomas will have to weigh the opportunity to have a justice who shares his constitutional philosophy replace him (something that will happen only when there is a Republican president and a Republican Senate) against his desire to stay on a court that could be more conservative now that Kavanaugh has replaced Anthony Kennedy. The oldest Democratic-appointed justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, will be 86 next year and will want to stay in the job until there’s a Democratic president (or at least a Democratic Senate) if she can.

The GOP Senate gains also mean that Republicans are in a better position to hold on to the Senate in 2020, but that is by no means guaranteed. Republicans are likely to retake

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DARREN HAUCK / GETTY



the Alabama Senate seat in 2020 (recently deposed Attorney General Jeff Sessions is reportedly considering running for his old seat), but they will have to defend Republican seats in the blue state of Maine and the battlegrounds of Colorado, Arizona, Iowa, North Carolina, Texas, and Georgia.

## REPUBLICANS (PARTIALLY) MELT DOWN IN THE MIDWEST.

Donald Trump's path to victory in the Electoral College in 2016 ran through the Midwest. He took Pennsylvania and Wisconsin by 0.7 percentage points (while Republican Senate candidates did a bit better) and Michigan by 0.3 percentage points. Republicans suffered losses in all three states this November.

In Wisconsin, Democratic senator Tammy Baldwin won reelection by 11 points, while governor Scott Walker suffered a 1-point loss that denied him a third term. Walker, who had been the top target of unions and survived a pro-Obama electorate, was finally undone by an anti-Trump backlash. (Republicans, though, maintained a strong grip on the Wisconsin state legislature, and most of Walker's policy achievements will survive him.)

In Pennsylvania, incumbent Democratic senator Bob Casey won reelection by 13 points, while incumbent Democratic governor Tom Wolf won by 17 points. In Michigan, the governor's mansion being vacated by retiring Republican Rick Snyder will be filled by Democrat Gretchen Whitmer, who won by 9 points, while incumbent Democratic senator Debbie Stabenow fended off a strong challenge from John James, a young African-American Army veteran, by 6 points.

The GOP's mini-meltdown in the Midwest doesn't mean Trump is doomed there in 2020. In 2010 Democrats lost statewide races in all three states, and Barack Obama still carried them all in 2012. But there are at least a couple reasons a Midwestern backlash is more ominous for Trump than it was for Obama.

First, Obama had a bigger cushion in these states than Trump does. Obama won Wisconsin by 14 points in 2008 and 7 points in 2012, Michigan by 16 points in 2008 and 9 points in 2012, and Pennsylvania by 10 points in 2008 and 5 points in 2012. Trump, by contrast, can't slide at all in these three states; he won each by less than one point.

Second, the economy had still been in the gutter in 2010 and was improving in 2012. Now the econ-



*Beto O'Rourke and wife Amy Sanders thank supporters in Texas, November 6.*

omy is booming, and Republicans still lost in these key battleground states. It's anyone's guess if the business cycle will bust before 2020.

## PROGRESSIVE STARS BURN OUT IN STATEWIDE RACES.

Of course, all was not well for Democrats either. Their young and dynamic statewide candidates who enraptured the progressive base all lost: Beto O'Rourke in Texas, Stacey Abrams in Georgia, and Andrew Gillum in Florida.

If Gillum, who was trailing by 0.4 percentage points as we went to press, had won in Florida, the entire narrative about progressive-versus-establishment

Democrats would've been different. The story would have been that an unapologetic progressive can win a battleground state that voted for Trump, and O'Rourke and Abrams did make things surprisingly close in longtime GOP bastions. Abrams lost to Brian Kemp by 1.6 points in Georgia. And O'Rourke lost to Ted Cruz by 2.6 points in Texas, where turnout exceeded that of the 2016 presidential election.

With the young progressive stars ultimately burning out, some pundits are chattering about the victories of incumbent progressive Democrats in the Midwest as the party's way forward. Ohio senator Sherrod Brown won reelection by six points, even though the same electorate provided a four-point victory to Republican gubernatorial candidate Mike DeWine. Incumbent senator Amy Klobuchar won reelection by 24 points in Minnesota, a state Trump lost by one point. And in the West, a boring generic Democrat, congresswoman Jacky Rosen, got the job done in Nevada by providing Democrats with their only Senate takeover.

Good news for the Democratic establishment? Maybe. But the 2018 elections showed that the Democratic base still hungers for a candidate who is young and a minority (or, in the case of Beto O'Rourke, a young Irish-American with a minority nickname). That's why the biggest Democratic winner from the 2018 midterms was someone not on the ballot: California senator Kamala Harris. Harris is a poised and progressive 54-year-old African-American woman, and the 2018 election gave her no new stars who won statewide office to compete with for media attention. If the 2020 ticket were being selected by party bosses in a smoke-filled room, they might nominate Joe Biden, pledging to serve only one term, at the top and Kamala Harris as running mate. Voters will of course make that decision, and after last Tuesday, Kamala Harris is in as good a position as any Democrat to be at the top of the ticket in 2020. ♦

# King of the Low Road

Iowa's worst congressman ekes out a victory.

BY ADAM RUBENSTEIN



Steve King, right, campaigning with Donald Trump and Iowa senator Joni Ernst, August 27

Iowa's 4th Congressional District is solidly Republican. In 2016, Donald Trump carried it by 27 points, and Steve King won his eighth term in the House of Representatives by 23 points. Yet on November 6, Democratic neophyte J.D. Scholten, a former minor-league pitcher making his living as a paralegal here in Sioux City, came within 10,000 votes of defeating King (he lost by just 3.4 points). The polling had been so close in the last few weeks that King dusted off a 2014 TV ad and bought some airtime. King was having to do something he doesn't typically have to do: campaign.

Scholten was operating out of an RV he calls "Sioux City Sue" after the old Gene Autry tune. He had

crisscrossed the district's 39 counties three times chasing votes. I met him at a bar called Sneakers in Fort Dodge. It was 10 o'clock at night but Scholten had missed dinner and was hungry. He had hoped his months on the road meeting with voters would resonate with a rural base. But "there aren't enough rural Democrats," he admitted. "All of [King's] controversial stuff is disgusting to me—and it drives me insane—but the fact that he doesn't fight for this district, that's the thing that riles me up so much more."

Steve King has said and done a lot of indecent things. In October, he endorsed Faith Goldy, a white nationalist running for mayor of Toronto. Both King and Goldy have publicly embraced the "great replacement" theory, which posits a coordinated global conspiracy to repopulate countries with immigrants. Usually it's the

Jews who are blamed for this—there were chants of "Jews will not replace us" during the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville in 2017. And in August, while on a foundation-funded trip to visit Holocaust sites in Poland, King took a side trip to Austria to have dinner with members of the far-right Freedom party, which has historical ties to the Nazis. He gave an interview to the party's website in which he decried George Soros's influence on U.S. elections, attacked immigration, and declared that "Western civilization is in decline."

He used to display a Confederate flag in his office on the Hill and has said of Hispanic immigrants to the United States that "for every one who's a valedictorian, there's another hundred out there that weigh 130 pounds and they've got calves the size of cantaloupes because they're hauling 75 pounds of marijuana across the desert." King likes to claim that media reports critical of him are "orchestrated by nasty, desperate, and dishonest fake news," but these are his own words, recorded, on video, and irrefutable. Several times while campaigning on November 5, he told audiences that the Democratic party has closer ties to the KKK than the Austrian Freedom party has to the Nazis.

At an event in Webster City in the back room of a bar and restaurant called the Second Street Emporium, King said the spotlight the media has placed on him is as "bad a propaganda as we have ever seen in this country. It is worse than character assassination." Talking of his meeting in Austria, he wondered aloud "what those folks who sat at that dinner would have to say about this propaganda, that they were going to compare it to what their fathers and grandfathers had seen on that continent some 70 or 75 years ago." One audience member asked if King would hold the press accountable for the lies. "We shall see," he replied.

Little of the global condemnation resonates with King's constituents, who are far more exercised by local difficulties: some real, some imagined. Unemployment is low in the

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STEPHEN MATUREN / GETTY



northwest corner of Iowa. Good meat-packing jobs have drawn immigrants and refugees from around the world over the last generation. At the same time, all too many young Iowans have gone off to college and never come back. At a GOP “Get Out the Vote” event in the back room of a Godfather’s Pizza in Hampton, Alyce Hugeback, a King supporter, told me that she views illegal immigration as one of the biggest problems in the district. But if there’s an immigration problem, it’s that there aren’t nearly enough people coming to northern Iowa—manufacturers pay a lot of overtime, so hard is it to find skilled labor. More than anything, the immigration issue stands in for a culturally sensitive topic: These largely white, rural voters see their kids and grandkids moving away and a different Iowa taking shape. Another King supporter at the pizzeria decried the “19 languages being spoken in the Storm Lake school system right now.”

Driving through the small towns of these rural counties, it’s easy to tell how this narrative got traction. Cars are few and the shops mostly boarded up. What were a generation ago active farming and manufacturing communities are decayed. King lives in Kiron but attends a Catholic church in nearby Odebolt, a town of 953 residents with tall cement grain silos and a train line cutting through it. The church has Saturday, not Sunday, mass, indicative of a struggling-to-survive congregation. On the bulletin board at Sparky’s gas station is a flier from the Faith and Freedom Coalition dissecting where King and Scholten stand on the issue of abortion. “On Demand Abortion, Scholten: Yes. King: No.” It’s a resonant message in a culturally conservative area. “If Steve King is re-elected, 950,000 innocent little babies can be saved every year,” the candidate himself tweeted this month. “If his opponent is elected, Nancy Pelosi will ensure all of them and more are aborted.” To the rural Iowan, immigration and abortion are the twin dangers that feed an all-encumbering feeling of being supplanted.

Yet the economic challenges here are real. Trump’s trade war is hurting the manufacturers, and the tariffs are beginning to bite farmers too. At an election-eve rally in Sioux Center (in Sioux County), Dolf Ivener, a 44-year-old farmer, had to be escorted out as he shouted at King: “\$7.50 for soy-

**In King’s district, immigration stands in for a culturally sensitive topic: These largely white, rural voters see their kids and grandkids moving away and a different Iowa taking shape. Another King supporter at the pizzeria decried the ‘19 languages being spoken’ in the local school system.**



*King challenger J.D. Scholten*

beans, I’m going to go broke because of you, Steve King! I’m going to go broke because of you.” It wasn’t racist remarks or his associations with neo-Nazis that drew King protests; it was the most local concern possible. China has reduced its purchase of U.S. soybeans by 94 percent in 2018, and farmers here are being pummeled. King is a vocal supporter of Donald Trump’s “trade war,” and his share of the blame for the price of soybeans is real. Even so, King still carried Sioux County the next day.

I asked King supporters what

they thought of his “somebody else’s babies” comment and his support for far-right politicians in places like Canada and Austria. Most didn’t know he’d said these things, and if they did, they didn’t care about them. They chalked it up to “the media being the media.” “If they don’t have anything else to say they call *racist* or *sexist*,” Alyce Hugeback said. In Hampton, King joked that he hoped Supreme Court justices Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan would “elope to Cuba” and make room for a 7-2 conservative majority on the Supreme Court. The remark made the rounds on Twitter and was condemned as racist, homophobic, and misogynistic. The Hampton gathering giggled at the gibe. It was just business as usual for King. In Webster City, he had obliquely referred to Mexicans and any immigrants coming over from California as “dirt.” None of it worried the Republican voters of the 4th District.

Nor did Steve Stivers’s condemnation of King. The Ohio congressman is chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee and sharply disavowed King’s race-based remarks in October. “Congressman Steve King’s recent comments, actions, and retweets are completely inappropriate. We must stand up against white supremacy and hate in all forms, and I strongly condemn this behavior,” tweeted Stivers. Some in the Iowa GOP similarly sought to distance themselves from King during this election. A local GOP insider told me just how much discord there is in the party when it comes to King. “We’re trying to put out a positive message, and he steps on it every day. He used to do a lot [for Iowa]. He’s MIA in D.C.,” he told me. “He’s on his crusade overseas, and he’s leaving Iowa voters behind. No one is comfortable with him anymore.”

Iowa GOP co-chairman Cody Hoefert was abnormally silent on social media in regard to King. He tweeted out support of GOP candidates David Young, Rod Blum, and Kim Reynolds in the week preceding the election but, conspicuously, not King. Yet there was Hoefert

introducing the newly reelected King at his victory party at the Stoney Creek Inn in Sioux City. Hoefert said, “What the left and the liberal media tried to do to our congressman was an absolute travesty. We refused to let the left Kavanaugh our congressman.” King picked up this theme in his victory speech: There was, he said, “an attempt to Kavanaugh-ize me like this state has never seen, and maybe America has never seen.” He claimed to be “bloodied but unbowed” and “if they could have knocked me off tonight, the ‘life issue’ would have been set back, who knows, decades.”

King views himself as an essential member of Congress despite a very meager legislative record. He did his best in his appearances throughout the district to associate himself with Iowa’s “Heartbeat Bill,” a piece of pro-life legislation put together by Governor Kim Reynolds. King likes to say Hoefert called him the “father of the Heartbeat bill.” He mentioned this at several events on November 5 and at his victory party.

At J.D. Scholten’s election night party, attendees were optimistic as the first precincts closed and poll numbers appeared. The returns showed Ted Cruz besting Beto O’Rourke and Ron DeSantis defeating Andrew Gillum, but Scholten told me that he’s “just worried about the 4th District. I don’t worry about a lot of national stuff. ... I don’t believe in a blue wave, I believe in earning votes in this district.” But as the night progressed, and the rural votes were tabulated, Scholten fell behind. In his concession speech, he invoked the names of Tom Harkin and Berkley Bedell—Iowans who lost their first race, ran again, and won.

Cale Dobson, 23, of Sioux City voted for Trump in the last election but supported Scholten in this race. He told me that he’s disappointed in Scholten’s defeat but knows he’s “not the type of person to give up, and I’m confident he’ll run again and win.” As they were everywhere on Election Day 2016, eyes were already on 2020 in Iowa’s 4th district. ♦

# It Was a Good Night for the Pollsters

Not perfect, but nonetheless impressive.

BY DAVID BYLER



*Pre-midterms marchers in Chicago’s Grant Park on October 13*

**D**idn’t the polls and statistical models get everything wrong in 2016? How can I trust them?

Every political data analyst has been asked those same questions over and over since the 2016 election. Prior to Election Day 2016, many people watched the campaign coverage and concluded that the polls ruled out a Donald Trump win and signaled clearly that Hillary Clinton would be president. That perception wasn’t correct. Polls can be off in the same direction in multiple key states, but models and analysts who factored in those errors were able to see the possibility of a Trump upset ahead of time. But it nevertheless stuck with people, and after Election Day they

felt burned and lost faith in the polls.

Perhaps 2018 will help the public trust survey research and predictive modeling a little bit more. This year, the data did a good job of predicting the final election outcome.

Heading into the election, the consensus both in the world of data and the world of reporting was (1) that the most likely outcome in the House was a decent Democratic win, with a blue landslide and a GOP hold both still possible and (2) that Republicans would likely hold the Senate and probably add to their majority.

These general predictions were right, or close to it. Democrats took the House and Republicans padded their margin in the Senate by a bit more than expected.

In fact, at press time, the best estimate for the number of Democratic seats is in the high 220s or low 230s.

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KAMIL KRZACZYNSKI / AFP / GETTY



On election eve, I used the data to estimate that Democrats would end up with 228 seats. Moreover, statistical forecast models projected that Democrats would end up with approximately 231 or 227 seats. The *Real Clear Politics* (RCP) average indicated that Democrats would win the overall House popular vote by seven points, and they seem poised to achieve something very close to that. That all communicates a solid level of accuracy.

On the Senate side, our *TWS* Forecast thought that 52 GOP seats was the likeliest outcome. We don't know the final composition yet—Arizona is still out and Florida is headed for a recount—but it looks like Republicans will probably end up with 53 or 54 seats. That's not perfect, but it's well within the plausible range of outcomes the model laid out.

It's harder to say how good the polls were on a race-by-race basis at this point. Votes are still being counted in some of the most important races (e.g., some California House races won't be confirmed for a while), and the exact accuracy of the polls is something I intend to revisit in more detail soon. But I will note a few things about what happened on the Senate side.

In some cases, there were real polling errors. RCP's poll average in Indiana (one of the best aggregates out there) put incumbent Democratic senator Joe Donnelly ahead by about a point; in fact, Mike Braun, the Republican, will likely win by a large margin (he's ahead by about eight points at press time). In Tennessee, the final average of polls was off by about six points. The polls also seem to have undershot Missouri Republican Josh Hawley, who appears to be headed for a six-point win despite being virtually tied with Sen. Claire McCaskill heading into the election.

Some of the misses were smaller. In Florida, Democratic senator Bill Nelson led Republican governor Rick Scott by 2.4 points heading into the election, but Scott is now ahead as they move toward a recount. So the call was wrong there, but the polls were only off by a couple of points.

The polls appeared to be off by a similar margin in West Virginia, where incumbent senator Joe Manchin won by three points despite leading in the polls by about five points. And Texas falls somewhere between this category and the last one—Democratic candidate Beto O'Rourke outperformed his polls by a few points.

In other key races, the polls were better. In New Jersey, they suggested a roughly 10-point win and that appears to be about what scandal-ridden Democratic senator Bob Menendez got. The polls accurately predicted Dem-

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ocrat Jon Tester's three-point lead in Montana. In North Dakota, the polls were off by less than two points despite the fact that the race was under-pollled in the final stretch. The final Ohio Senate polls were off by a couple of points, but generally trending in the right direction by election day's end. And the Wisconsin polls got the Leah Vukmir-Tammy Baldwin result almost exactly right. Arizona hasn't been called yet, but the polls correctly suggested a very close race.

And the "sleeper" races stayed asleep. Democrat Tina Smith won the Minnesota special Senate race for Al Franken's old seat by low double digits (the average of the last three polls showed a 10-point lead), and Bob Casey won reelection in Pennsylvania by about 13 while the polls showed him up by 14. The polls even caught on to Republican John James's late (and ultimately unsuccessful) surge in

barely talked-about Michigan, showing him behind by eight points before he lost by six.

The data was also decent but not perfect in races for governor. Most of the races that weren't considered tossups ahead of time stayed off the map. And the polls in the tossup states were helpful even without demonstrating pinpoint accuracy.

In Georgia, the preelection polls were only off by a point and a half. The Florida polls were off by about four points—a real but not unheard-of error. In Wisconsin, the average of the last three polls showed a roughly 2.3-point lead for Democrat Tony Evers, and he barely eked out a one-point win over Republican governor Scott Walker. Republican Kristi Noem, who led the South Dakota polls by two, won by three. Democrat Kate Brown almost exactly hit her poll average in Oregon, and Republican Mike DeWine beat his polls by quite a bit in Ohio (he won by about four points after trailing by mid-single digits in the final polls). Republican Kris Kobach in Kansas underperformed his polls (he lost to Laura Kelly by five points after leading by one in the final three polls).

Once we get full results from every district and state we'll be able to calculate the exact level of polling error this cycle. But these numbers look pretty good from 30,000 feet. Democrats did about as well as expected in the House. Republicans did better in the Senate than projected, but it was well within the range of plausible outcomes. Republicans did a bit better than some expected in governor races, but the result didn't seem crazy (e.g., at press time the Democrats had netted six seats and I guessed they would net between six and eight on the morning of Election Day).

There are good reasons to be careful about how you use and examine the polls (there can be low response rates, different methodological choices by various pollsters, complicated sources of error, correlated error, etc.). But this election should prove that they're not garbage. In fact, they're arguably the best tool we have for understanding public opinion. ♦

# They Don't Like Him That Much

The suburbs spell trouble for Trump.

BY MICHAEL WARREN



*Karen Handel leaves a House Republican meeting on Capitol Hill, September 5.*

When asked at his November 7 press conference at the White House what lesson he took from the midterm elections, Donald Trump responded, “I think that people like me.” That wasn’t much of a lesson, nor was it the most obvious assessment of how the voters had spoken. Yes, Trump’s Republicans gained seats in the Senate and held on in several competitive governor’s races. But the swing of around 30 Republican-held seats to the Democrats didn’t just change control of the House of Representatives—it also suggested that a bloc of voters Trump will need to win reelection actually *don’t* like him very much.

In suburban areas across the country, from New York to Utah to Michigan to Virginia to Kansas, the GOP is losing support. There’s no question this has a lot to do with the president.

*Michael Warren is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

Some of these areas are in states Trump won in 2016, some he lost, but what unites most of them is how much they look like a key part of the Republican coalition: suburban, educated, above-average wealth.

But no longer. Compare the exit polls from 2018 and the previous midterm election. In 2014, half of all college graduates voted for a Republican House candidate, while just 39 percent did so in 2018. Among white college graduates, 57 percent voted GOP in 2014 compared with only 45 percent in 2018. In 2014, voters from households making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 annually went for Republicans at 55 percent. Four years later, only 47 percent of those voters pulled the lever for the GOP.

What happened to Republican Karen Handel of Georgia is indicative. In 2016, her district encompassing the north side of Atlanta’s suburbs overwhelmingly reelected its Republican representative, Tom Price, by

more than 20 points. (Trump, on the other hand, carried it by less than two.) After Price resigned to join Trump’s cabinet, Handel ran in an April 2017 special election that drew national attention and liberal campaign donations for her Democratic opponent. Handel won, but the GOP margin dropped by 19 points—closer to Trump’s performance a few months earlier than to Price’s.

In 2018, Handel faced a strong Democratic opponent in gun-control activist Lucy McBath, and the benefits of incumbency seem to have deserted her. The portions of the district in Cobb and Fulton counties are the most Republican-friendly, and in 2016 Price won both with over 60 percent of the vote. He even won in Democratic-heavy DeKalb County. In 2018, Handel lost big in DeKalb, won just 55 percent in Cobb, barely edged out McBath in Fulton—and lost the race by one point. It’s no coincidence that at the top of the ticket, Republican gubernatorial candidate Brian Kemp made little effort to contest these inner suburbs. He lost Handel’s district by about 14,000 votes. Greg Bluestein of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported the Kemp campaign “avoided” the metro Atlanta area in favor of maximizing turnout in the state’s rural counties. The Trump-aligned Kemp won statewide while still losing the suburbs. Handel was not so fortunate.

This is a culmination of the strategy Trump brought to his adopted party: actively court the white working-class voter. These blue-collar conservatives had been skeptical of the plutocratic Mitt Romney and the conventional GOP agenda four years earlier, went the thinking, while a straight-talker with a populist agenda could add them to a successful Republican coalition. The new strategy still requires keeping the existing members of the coalition in the tent, however, especially the suburbanites.

But there’s a problem: These suburban voters are not Trump’s base. In many ways they are the segment of the party Trump’s candidacy was

BILL CLARK / CQ ROLL CALL / GETTY



designed to ignore, downplay, or even antagonize. Republicans in these districts aren't as alarmed by immigration. They prefer the benefits of global trade to the protections of tariffs. They bristle at Trump's coarse style of politics that punches first and asks questions later. For these voters, civility and moral leadership are more than just niceties—they're motivating issues. The message Trump and the GOP send, either incidentally or intentionally, is that these Americans matter less. Increasingly, they're listening.

In a perfect demonstration of how the Trump-led Republican party thinks of these voters, the president used his post-election press conference to name and shame those GOP House members who have been most skeptical of Trump and who lost in their suburban districts. Their problem? They didn't "want the embrace" of Trump:

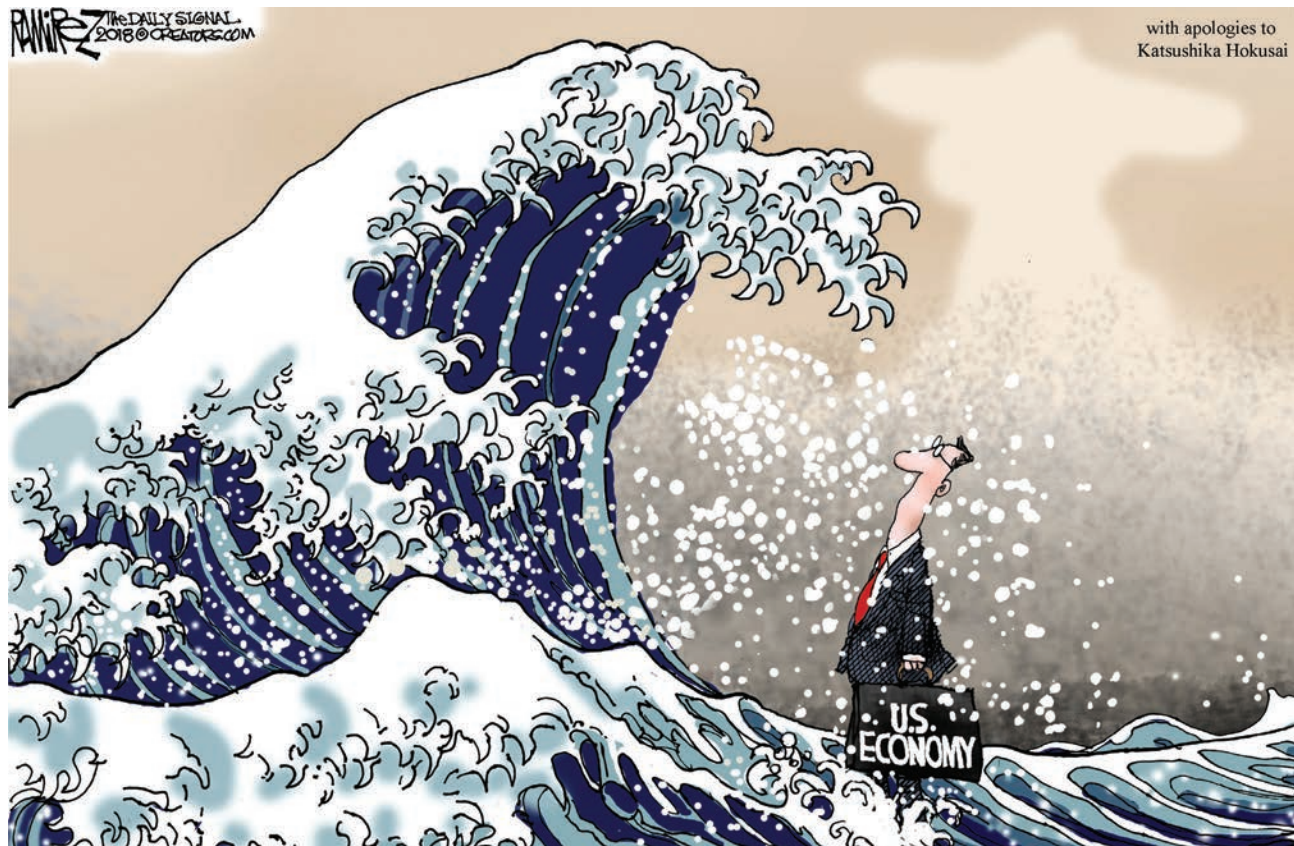


Ga.-6 victor Lucy McBath campaigning November 2

Carlos Curbelo. Mike Coffman, too bad, Mike. Mia Love. I saw Mia Love. She'd call me all the time to help her with a hostage situation. Being held hostage in Venezuela. But Mia Love gave me no love, and she lost. Too bad. Sorry about that,

Mia. And Barbara Comstock was another one. I mean, I think she could have run that race, but she didn't want to have any embrace. For that, I don't blame her. But she—she lost. Substantially lost. Peter Roskam didn't want the embrace. Erik Paulsen didn't want the embrace.

Post-midterms, Trump gets a House conference that's more amenable to him—but one in the minority, without any real power. Maybe the Trumpian GOP believes it no longer needs suburban voters in its coalition to win in 2020. Maybe, as happened in the statewide Senate and gubernatorial races where the GOP overshot expectations, Republicans will be able to grind out future reelection victories. But it's also possible that this year's unhappy suburban voters are the first sign of a weakening Republican coalition, one that might not end up liking Trump as much in 2020 as he will need them to. ♦



# Embrace the Darkness

*Trump won the midterms because the Republican party lost*

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

**T**he midterm elections were good for Donald Trump.

Yes, Republicans lost the House. Yes, a Democratic House will make Trump's life difficult. But for now, if you're looking for confirmation bias—and by all accounts, that's the mode of analysis our president prefers—there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the only thing the Trump administration needs is More Trump.

For starters, the Trump clones did well. Sure, Corey Stewart and Kris Kobach lost. But Trump can tell himself that Virginia is a Clinton state he doesn't need and that he couldn't lose Kansas in 2020 if he tried. In important states—tossups he has to have for reelection—the Trump clones won. In Florida and Georgia, Ron DeSantis and Brian Kemp ran as Mini-Trumpers. And not only did these two win, but they beat the kind of young, progressive minority candidates that the Democrats are itching to put up against Trump in two years.

The Trump loyalists did okay, too. Rick Scott was one of the first mainstream Republicans to endorse Trump, and he's now in the Senate. Beautiful Ted came around on Trump and this fluffing turned out to be the only reason Cruz was able to hold off a long-haired hippie skateboarder with an Irish surname.

But most important, the Trump skeptics took a thumping. Barbara Comstock, Mia Love, Mike Coffman—all of those uppity conservatives who voted for Trump when they had to, but refused to bend the knee? Gone, gone, and gone. And in case you doubt how crucial this was to the president, he spent several minutes of his postelection press conference naming and shaming the Republican losers who did not sufficiently “embrace”—his word, he used it five times—him.

Because, as everyone knows, Carlos Curbelo would have held on to Florida's 26th District—which is 72 percent Hispanic and 50 percent foreign-born—had he gotten on board with Trump's plan to sign away birthright citizenship. Cuck got what he deserved.

The gains in the Senate are even better. Not only did Republicans add to their number, they did so while subtracting people, such as Jeff Flake and Bob Corker, who never showed the same level of discernment as Beautiful Ted. The

result is a bigger, Trumpier majority, which, by extension, will put even more pressure on the one or two remaining Republican senators who have been reluctant to embrace the president.

Mind you, this won't help with passing legislation. The Trump administration will conclude its first term having accomplished only a single noteworthy piece of lawmaking. But the Framers did, for whatever reason, assign the Senate certain oversight duties that are required of it from time to time. So if, for instance, the president needed the Senate to

confirm a judge or a new attorney general, or—and we're just spitballing here—vote on a trial of impeachment, then Trump is in a much stronger position.

I'm being flip, but it is important to understand that for all the talk about how Trumpism is a reaction to leftism and social-justice warriors and political correctness, the truth is that it is principally an intra-party fight. It's the final crackup of Cold War Republicanism; a cultural revolution in which the lumpenproletariat seized control of the party from the pointy heads and exiled them to the labor camps. And like the Maoists, the Trumpers aren't really interested in picking a fight with the other superpower. They're much more concerned with controlling the near abroad—which is to say, the Republican party. That's why they tend to focus their hatred on Republicans and conservatives who decline to get on board, rather than on Democrats and liberals. Jeff Flake is the enemy; Kamala Harris is just a random nonplayer character.



*The morning after: Trump declares victory, November 7.*

*Jonathan V. Last is the digital editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*

CALLA KESSLER / WASHINGTON POST / GETTY



Always remember that Trumpers—the people who believe in him, not the remora fish looking for their bits of chum—care very little about the left. Their real opponents are other Republicans. Seen from that perspective, Tuesday's vote was a huge success. Because for Trumpers, it's never a binary choice. Wherever a Trump-skeptical Republican was running against a Democrat, Trumpism couldn't lose.

If you want to understand the state of the Republican party today, consider this: Steve King and Duncan Hunter will be congressmen next year; Mia Love and Pete Roskam won't. These twin events reflect Trump's understanding of what voters want.

In the final weeks of the midterm campaign, 4 percent looked like the most important number in politics: unemployment was under it and GDP growth over it. This was, economically speaking, as good as it gets, and most political professionals thought Republicans should be running on these numbers.

Yet Trump decided to close the election with *American Carnage 2*. He obsessed about the caravan that was winding its way to our southern border. (No one seems to have asked why they wouldn't be deterred by the Wall that Mexico paid for.) Trump ordered 5,000 troops to the border. Then the number was 10,000. Then 15,000. Then he said he was going to order these soldiers to fire on anyone who threw a rock in their general direction, even though the caravan was still a thousand miles away. The president ran an anti-immigration ad so vile that Fox News—the network whose journalists appeared onstage at a Trump campaign rally—pulled it off the air.

In short, Trump looked at our fat, happy days of peace and prosperity and decided to run on fear, division, and chaos. And he was right.

In politics, as in every other facet of life, you must always consider opportunity cost. And yes, it's possible that some other closing message from the president might have produced marginally better electoral outcomes for Republicans. But maybe not. At the very least, the president's gambit did no great harm. There was no big break against Republicans. Most of the races went according to form. In some cases—DeSantis, Mike Braun, Kemp, Josh Hawley—Republicans did better than final polling predicted.

The caravan worked. Sticking with Brett Kavanaugh was smart. There was no price for playing “false flag” games with the attempted mail-bombing of Democrats. No apologies, for anything, ever.

Those are the lessons of 2018 and the doctrines that will shape the war of 2020. You can understand why Trump looked across the country on Tuesday night and tweeted, “Tremendous success tonight. Thank you to all!” He was smiling. The GOP caucuses in both the House and Senate will be even more friendly to him than before. His enemies have been crushed beneath his feet.



Lying in wait: Adam Schiff and Nancy Pelosi

And yet. The problem with getting rid of Love and Curbelo and Comstock is that it gives Democrats control of the House. Trumpism may not be interested in Democrats, but Democrats are interested in Trump. And now they have subpoena power.

Once a new speaker is sworn in, the Democrats will be able to investigate and call witnesses and poke and prod the administration in ways we can foresee and ways we cannot. There are, for instance, reports that the president's son expects to be indicted. If that

comes to pass, any attempt by the president to protect him will face scrutiny with the force of law behind it.

The White House and its surrogates have announced that they welcome Democratic overreach and are prepared to make war against congressmen who push investigations. Trump expressly threatened potential investigators in his press conference.

But the kinds of Democrats willing to take the hardest line against Trump will be from the safest districts. Trump can't hurt them. And, moreover, getting to overreach means enduring an awful lot of pain during the initial-reach. Clinton and the Democrats benefited from Republican overreach in the 1998 midterm elections. The experience was not terribly pleasant for them.

There are other problems on the horizon. The Democrats who won on Tuesday—Jon Tester, Joe Manchin, Tim Kaine—tended to be more centrist. The party's progressive stars—Beto! Andrew! Stacey!—were wiped out, leaving Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez sitting forlornly in the corner with her movie-star cheekbones, glamorous jackets, and lost dreams of a socialist-Democratic future. This does not



mean that Democratic voters will choose a nominee who is in step with mainstream politics in 2020. But these losses make that possibility more likely. The lesson has been taught, and all Democrats have to do is learn it.

There's even the possibility that Democrats may look at the midterms and the caravan and learn a lesson about immigration. They're never going to outbid Trump on nativism, but they don't have to. All they have to do is convince a small share of marginal independent voters that they're not secretly for open borders and that they do take illegal immigration seriously. If you can't do that while maintaining your liberal base, then you don't belong in professional politics. It's not a heavy lift.

The other problem for Trump is that the numbers don't look especially good for him. It is difficult to imagine external circumstances being better for Republicans two years from now—you can't really top "no major wars and 4 percent." So the macro-environment will either be equivalent or worse.

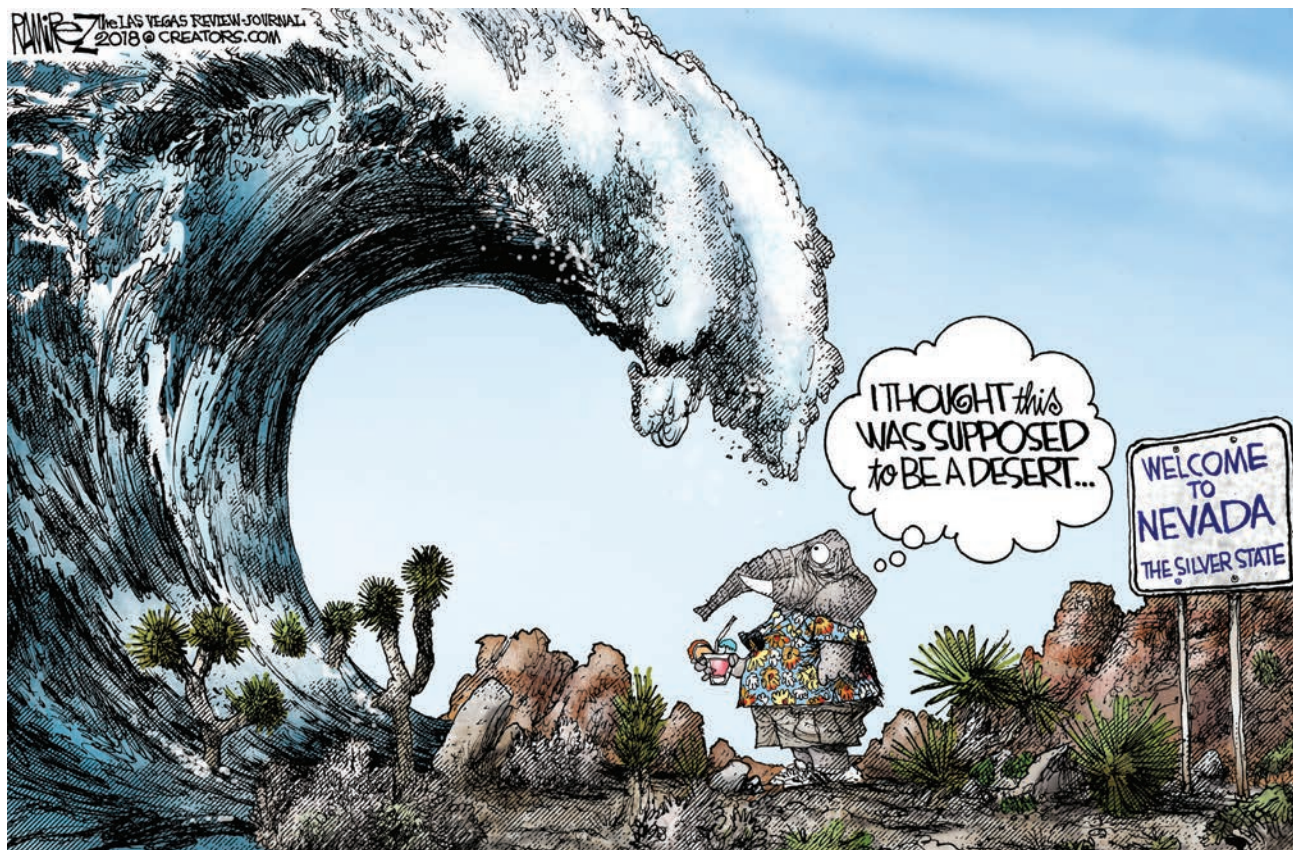
And here is what the president's level of support looks like: In 2016, he got the second-smallest share of the popular vote (46.1 percent) of any Republican since 2000. He ran 3 points—which is a lot—behind Republicans in the House popular vote that year. And in the 2018 midterms, he pulled the Republican share of the House popular vote down to

his own 2016 level, to what is likely the third-smallest percentage for Republicans since 1994 (we won't know until the final numbers are tallied). Trump won in 2016 because even though he ran behind most congressional Republicans, their turnout was enough to pull him over the line. Over the last two years, Republicans have been pulled backward toward him, not the other way around.

**T**he good news for Trump and his Republicans is that they won't have to beat the '27 Yankees. They just have to beat whomever the Democrats put in front of them.

The bad news is that they begin the cycle from a position of weakness, with the electoral trends moving away from them. Practically speaking, this means that for Trump in 2020, there cannot be a Morning in America campaign. There will be no 48-state mandate that realigns American politics for a generation. At best, Trump can hope to radicalize Democrats into nominating a weak contender and then gamble that the country is closely enough divided to give him a chance of drawing to an inside straight, again. This is not a crazy strategy. It might even be the best move available on the board.

All of which means more chaos, more apocalypse, more carnage. More Trump. ♦



# Duncan Hunter's Last Hurrah?

*A 60-count federal indictment was only a slight impediment to reelection. Whether he serves out his term is another question.*

BY ANDREW EGGER

*San Diego*

As the ballot returns start to come in, melancholy settles over the GOP faithful gathered at the U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego. Not despair—it's hard to despair as you sip \$13 beers with friends and comrades under ballroom chandeliers—but the kind of game “well, we fought hard” attitude career operatives adopt when races go awry, as they mostly are this year for Republicans in the area. On stage, a parade of losers: Gubernatorial candidate John Cox is here to concede to Democrat Gavin Newsom, as is Diane Harkey, who has failed to stave off a Democratic challenge to the seat currently held by retiring Republican Darrell Issa. After tonight, only one local GOP congressman will be left standing: Duncan Hunter, who has for a decade represented the inland 50th District, long the most solidly Republican in the state. And he's not here.

Eschewing both the glitz and the gloom, Hunter has opted to watch the returns come in at a private event in his home suburb of Alpine, 30 minutes outside San Diego. It's a quiet affair: invite-only, no media, no public speech. The first we outsiders hear from Hunter after he locks up his sixth straight election is a muted statement emailed out Wednesday morning: “The voters of California's 50th Congressional district have once again made it clear that their issues and priorities are consistent with my issues

and priorities as their Representative. . . . I am grateful and honored for the opportunity to continue serving them in Congress.”

This is the 20th consecutive time a man named Duncan Hunter has carried the East County district—as Hunter's father, Duncan L., did 14 times between 1980 and 2008 and as he has done ever since. But this time may be the last. This summer, Hunter and his wife were indicted by the Department of Justice for allegedly spending hundreds of thousands of dollars of campaign funds

on personal expenses, from lavish family vacations to routine household purchases to bar tabs at Capitol Hill watering holes. The picture that emerges from the indictment is almost cartoonish: Hunter grouching at his campaign treasurer for “trying to create some kind of paper trail” on his purchases; his wife telling him to buy clothes at the pro shop and chalk up the purchase as golf balls “for the wounded warriors.” Hunter claims the charges are the result of a witch hunt and politically motivated. The trial starts next month.

In the wake of the indictment, Hunter's initial attempts at damage control backfired spectacularly. Appearing on Fox News to discuss the details of the indictment in late August, Hunter seemed to blame his wife for the charges: “She handled my finances throughout my entire military career, and that continued on when I got into Congress. . . . So whatever she did, that'll be looked at too, I'm sure. But I didn't do it. I didn't spend any money illegally.”

With Hunter locked in as the district's GOP nominee, Democrats smelled blood. They began to pump money into the race in support of their little-known contender:



*Hunter at the federal courthouse in San Diego for an arraignment hearing, August 23*

*Andrew Egger is a reporter at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.*



Ammar Campa-Najjar, a former Obama administration labor official of Mexican and Palestinian heritage. A Christian and a staunch progressive, Campa-Najjar positioned himself as the fresh, sincere alternative to a corrupt incumbent, declaring his allegiance to “country over party” and printing signs with the slogan “Raise the Bar with Ammar.” Hunter responded by blasting Campa-Najjar over his family tree—specifically, his grandfather Muhammad Yusuf al-Najjar, a member of the Black September group, who was believed by Israel to have helped plan the Palestinian terrorist attack that killed 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. Al-Najjar was killed by Israeli commandos in Beirut the following year, 16 years before Campa-Najjar was born, and Campa-Najjar has denounced his extremist beliefs. So when the Hunter campaign cut an ad in September warning that “Ammar Campa-Najjar is working to infiltrate Congress” and declaring the Democrat a “security risk,” it understandably provoked a whole new round of outrage.

With the intensifying scrutiny of his actions—as an indicted congressman and a candidate willing to go low—it is perhaps no surprise that in the final weeks of the campaign season, the Duncan Hunter campaign went more or less underground. In the days leading up to his victory last Tuesday, the five-term congressman was allegedly hard at work at the nitty-gritty of electoral politics—shaking hands, waving signs, kissing babies—somewhere in the San Diego suburbs and small towns that make up his district. You’ll have to take his word for it, though—the press weren’t invited along for the ride.

“In terms of campaign strategy, Hunter didn’t have a lot of good options,” University of San Diego political science professor Casey Dominguez told *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*. “The best way for him to win was probably to ride his party ID and name recognition in the district to victory. Media coverage couldn’t have helped that much, especially because in any story about him, or any interview, he would be asked about the indictment, or the ads, or both.”

In Hunter’s telling, of course, swearing off most press wasn’t about avoiding awkward questions. Rather, it was a simple matter of refusing to give mainstream media outlets, hopelessly biased against the congressman from the get-go, free ammunition with which to take potshots at him.



*Ammar Campa-Najjar campaigning in Fallbrook, California, October 28*

“There is a level of frustration with the media as a whole that we continue to talk about certain things, certain issues, and it’s either not reported or it’s dismissed, and they just want to focus on what they think is the permanent issue,” Hunter spokesman Michael Harrison says. “We don’t need the media to implement our strategy. If anything, what Trump has shown us is that you can go directly to the people without being edited, or without depending on the media to articulate your message through social media, through being with the people directly.”

According to Harrison, the uproar over the “security risk” ad proved this point. One candidate has terrorists in the family and ties to organizations like the Council on American-Islamic Relations, and it’s racist for the other candidate to point those things out?

“Congressman Hunter’s point is this: When you are working in a Congress making decisions on national security issues, whether it be funding, whether it be authorizing new programs, what have you, when you are trying to work with an administration that is conducting an active war on terror, and you have known, existing relationships with known terrorist organizations, you are not fit to be making those types of policy decisions.” But of course Campa-Najjar does not have “known existing relation-

ships with known terrorist organizations.” He has a family tree he was born into, and as the old saying goes, you don’t choose your family.

After days of nagging, I was finally given permission to tag along as Hunter delivered pizzas to a local call center and sat for a local TV interview (with KUSI, the only station, Harrison said, that had been fair to their campaign). When the pizzas had been delivered (more pizzas than callers) and the TV spot was complete (all softballs), I asked Hunter whether his critics had misrepresented his ad or if he actually believed Campa-Najjar was potentially a dangerous agent of radical Islam.

“I’m not calling him a radical Muslim,” Hunter said. “But when you look at *sharia* law, that’s a real thing that separates Islam from just about every other religion. Buddhists don’t have their own form of government. Christians don’t have their own form of government. But Islamists do.”

And would Campa-Najjar be receptive to the establishment of *sharia* law in America?

“I think he would be more receptive to it, just based on his family ties and where he comes from.”

SANDY HUFFAKER / AFP / GETTY

And the fact that he's a Christian, from a family of Christian Arabs, doesn't factor in?

"No, I don't think so."

The baldness of this answer so took me aback that I completely forgot to ask any follow-up questions about the criminal charges facing Hunter. Which, in a way, was probably the point. Afterwards, the TV interviewer sidled up. "You know my station's not gonna let me ask those questions," he said. "But I'd be dumb not to get it on tape."

Most national coverage of Hunter's campaign tended to characterize the incumbent's lurch into Muslim-baiting as a Hail Mary play, a last-ditch effort to lock down a district in revolt over Hunter's criminal indictment. McKay Coppins summed up this mood in the *Atlantic* this week: "Publicly disgraced, out of money, and facing both jail time and a suddenly surging challenger—what was an indicted congressman to do? Eventually, Hunter seemed to arrive at his answer: Try to eke out a win by waging one of the most brazenly anti-Muslim smear campaigns in recent history."

While that's an accurate description of Hunter's strategy, for many of the rank-and-file Republicans who lifted Hunter to victory on Tuesday, the race was far more prosaic. In fact, Republicans I spoke to in Santee and El Cajon rarely mentioned Campa-Najjar or Hunter's attacks on him at all. Some said they were happy with Hunter's support for the Trump economic agenda. Back during the 2016 campaign, Hunter was one of the earliest and most enthusiastic boarders of the Trump Train. Many admitted that the indictment was troubling, but why did Hunter's bad behavior mean they should elect a Democrat? If Hunter is convicted and resigns, they'll elect a new Republican to take his place. And anyway, haven't we had about enough of this mainstream media "guilty until proven innocent" nonsense?

"He's been doing a good job," one Santee resident told *TWS*. "Accusations is all they are. I mean, should we not have accepted [Brett] Kavanaugh for the accusations? It's the same thing. . . . I lean towards the candidate that's doing a good job, or has been doing a good job, or is innocent until proven guilty."

"Well, there's a couple of factors," said another, for whom Campa-Najjar's biography did factor in. "One is I did some research on him, found out who his dad and grandparents were, and that ain't gonna float with me. Duncan Hunter did some things he probably shouldn't have done, and in my opinion if he does get elected they'll probably end up replacing him anyway if he's guilty, but at least they'll replace him with another Republican."

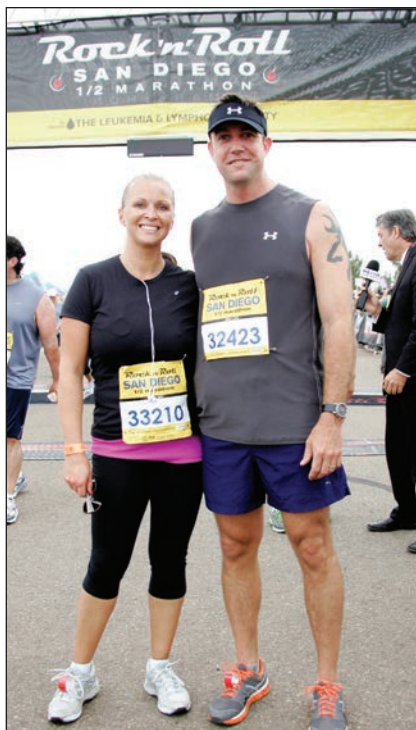
Supporters of Campa-Najjar, by contrast, were far more likely to remember—and resent—the ads. "I did see that ad on the local channel—I think it was two months ago or something," one voter said. "And I was shocked, honestly, to see—it seemed like an absurd ad to be aired on live television. It seemed like the kind of ad that you might see in a YouTube video or something, but it was right there on live TV."

There's no question Hunter limped to the finish line—his approximate 8-point victory over Campa-Najjar was nothing compared with his 28-point romp over Democrat Patrick Malloy in 2016. Indeed, the closest of his previous five races was a 17-point victory in 2008, his first race for the seat. But local GOP strategists say that at no point was his eventual victory ever in serious doubt.

"It's just too strong of a Republican district for Democrats," said Matt Schumsky, a San Diego political operative who worked on Hunter's first congressional campaign in 2008. "We've had some pretty strong Democrats that have challenged him, you know, people that they've put up with military records and all kinds of really good-on-paper people. No matter how moderate Democrat they are, that district still will vote Republican."

Which raises one last uncomfortable question: If Hunter didn't need the fearmongering to win, why spend so much time fearmongering? The answer presents itself. The indictment showed Hunter that most Republicans would stick with him, come what may. And if your base is already locked and loaded, isn't the safe play to go after the fringe too?

"I don't find any fault with Duncan's consultants or Duncan for running those ads," Schumsky said. "At this point, it's all just so horrible on all sides that you can't blame somebody for going all out in a fight." ♦



Hunter with wife Margaret after a race in San Diego, June 3, 2012





François Gérard's 1810 painting of Napoleon (on the white horse at right) at Austerlitz, the 1805 battle that was his greatest military victory

# Glory Days

*The longing that defined Napoleon, man of action.* BY ALGIS VALIUNAS

**M**en of action present a problem for decent modern democrats. For the very term “men of action” is a euphemism for men accomplished in war, and no public figure is more suspect these days than the warlike man. When Winston Churchill called Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) “the greatest man of action born in Europe since Julius Caesar,” he meant to praise Napoleon in the highest terms, but for many, such praise is fraught with peril. After all, Julius Caesar, named dictator in perpetuity, placed the Roman Republic in mortal

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**Napoleon**  
*A Life*  
by Adam Zamoyski  
Basic, 764 pp., \$40

danger and died a tyrant's death; the most famous of his assassins, Marcus Junius Brutus, is remembered as a paragon of republican virtue, though it proved impossible to restore the Republic after Caesar's day.

Napoleon for his part extinguished all hope of a French republic by prudently measured gradations. Having won public adulation by heroic feats of generalship in Italy and Egypt, he knocked over the ruling Directory in the bloodless coup of 18 Brumaire in 1799

and as First Consul commanded power greater than that wielded by Louis XIV; he did what dictators often do and designated himself consul for life in 1802; then he took the obvious next step for a hero-worshipper of Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great and crowned himself emperor in 1804. And like Caesar and Alexander he ended badly, abdicating the throne in 1814 after disastrous military defeats, forced into exile on the Mediterranean islet of Elba, reclaiming imperial power a year later, only to meet decisive calamity at Waterloo and be condemned to the South Atlantic island fastness of Saint Helena, from which the sole escape was death, a mercy when at last it came, in 1821.

To some it might seem only natural to compare Napoleon to Churchill, who was the greatest man of action since Napoleon, though not as a commander in the field. But a less attractive comparison has worked its way into historiographic orthodoxy since the Second World War, and it sees Napoleon “as a kind of proto-Hitler whose secret police, press censorship, aggressive foreign policy and desire for a new European order all presaged the horrors unleashed by the Nazis,” as Andrew Roberts writes in his masterly 2014 biography. Roberts finds this comparison as wrong as can be, and he does a manful job of rehabilitating Napoleon, without succumbing to abject devotion. Napoleon’s latest biographer, Adam Zamoyski, though not as inclined to encomium as Roberts, manages to do justice both to Napoleon’s achievements without flattery and to his grave flaws without invocations of totalitarian oppression or genocidal mania.

It may be tempting to portray Napoleon as a monster, whose war-making stained the killing fields of Europe, North Africa, and the Levant with the blood of some five million men. Zamoyski prefers to paint Napoleon as “the embodiment of his epoch,” which saw democracy emerge in a hard and bloody birth and the old regime attempt to snuff it out before it had the chance to draw a breath.

In the 1790s Napoleon entered a world at war, and one in which the very basis of human society was being questioned. It was a struggle for supremacy and survival in which every state on the Continent acted out of self-interest, breaking treaties and betraying allies shamelessly. Monarchs, statesmen, and commanders on all sides displayed similar levels of fearful aggression, greed, callousness, and brutality.

All nations were culpable, none was better than the rest, and one must simply accept that political men driven by “the lust for power” will engage in enormity without a second thought. Napoleon was not uniquely wicked, perhaps not wicked at all; in Zamoyski’s eyes to parcel out good

and evil is mere cant when discussing power politics.

Anyway, Napoleon was just a lieutenant when war broke out in 1792, so he cannot be held responsible for the general conflagration. Nor was he more bloody-minded than his predecessors in power. “French losses in the seven years of revolutionary government (1792-99) are estimated at four to five hundred thousand; those during the fifteen years of Napoleon’s rule are estimated at just under twice as high, at eight to nine hundred thousand.” Of course Zamoyski does not number here the four million enemy dead in the Napoleonic wars; for those the rulers who sent them into battle must evidently be held responsible, if one wishes to speak of responsibility at all.

For what ultimate purpose then did Napoleon devote his life to war, and for what were millions of Frenchmen so eager to kill and die? The ethos of the French Revolution exalted the warrior who fought for his country’s honor, and his own, to the pinnacle of human greatness. The erosion of Christian belief effected by the Enlightenment cult of reason had made eternal life seem a serious unlikelihood, not to say an impossibility; but one could still make oneself deathless after a fashion by feats of arms for France. For the French nation there was nothing one couldn’t do.

It was Man, not God, who was central to the new value system, and his collective identity, the Nation or “*patrie*,” became the object of worship. Henri Beyle, to become famous as the novelist Stendhal, was thirteen when Bonaparte took command of the Army of Italy and recalled that for his generation “our only religion was [...] *to be of service to the patrie*.”

Of course there was something more in it for the individual fighting man. What drove the Frenchmen of this age was the yearning for glory, earned in the service of the nation, in the face of imminent violent death. Such renown was the closest thing available to real immortality. *La gloire* roused the French heart like nothing

else. Zamoyski quotes Germaine de Staël on this consummate passion: “It is, without doubt, an intoxicating sensation to fill the universe with one’s name, to go so far beyond the bounds of one’s being that it becomes possible to delude oneself as to the limits and extent of one’s life, and to believe that one possesses some of the metaphysical attributes of infinity.” In Zamoyski’s cascade of praise for the “seemingly superhuman surge of energy” that glory inspires, one easily loses sight of Madame de Staël’s caveat: Glory can be a fatal delusion. And no man craved glory as Napoleon did, ravished by the lives of noble Greeks and Romans as recounted by Plutarch and avid to join that peerless company.

Yet violent death en masse has a pungent reality that the bubble reputation cannot equal. There are things worth killing and dying for, but for a truly serious man glory does not come high on the list. To treat war as a noble escapade is to misunderstand one’s humanity. True understanding is hard-won.

Many observers of the [Italian] campaign of 1796 commented on the almost festive spirit in which these men appeared to banter with death, singing on the march and laughing as they went into battle. “We were all very young,” recalled [Auguste de] Marmont, and “devoured by love of glory.”

Twelve years later, when he was an imperial marshal, the highest rank in Napoleon’s army but for the emperor himself, Marmont would be profoundly disabused of that youthful enthusiasm. Of the Battle of Wagram against the Austrians, which Zamoyski calls “the largest and longest-lasting battle Napoleon had fought,” Marmont would remark that the terrible shambles was “a victory without consequence.” Thousands died pointlessly. “The days when swarms of prisoners would fall into our hands, as in Italy, at Ulm, at Austerlitz, at Jena, were past.”

The enemy was more likely to fight to the death than in those palmy early victories, because now Napoleon was feared and hated. During the Wagram campaign, Napoleon sharply



inquired of General Mathieu Dumas, veteran of the American Revolution as well as the French, whether he was “one of those idiots who still believed in liberty.” When Dumas confessed that he was, Napoleon assured him that in fact like everyone else he was merely the instrument of his own ambition: Every lieutenant wanted to be a general, every general a marshal, every marshal a prince. For these honors they all were ready to die on the spot. Napoleon now embodied the malign cynicism of the power hungry. As Zamoyski writes, “From having been widely viewed as a liberator and a friend of the oppressed, he was now coming to be seen as the oppressor.”

The arrogance and greed of the new masters of Europe undercut the manifest benefit they brought.

There was an inherent contradiction at the heart of the whole Napoleonic imperium: its mission was to enlighten, liberate, and modernize. Feudalism was swept away, along with all disabilities imposed by guilds and corporations, Jews were liberated, and all forms of servitude abolished, yet new hierarchies were created and political constraints imposed on the economy. Since most of the inhabitants of the Continent recognised only monarchy as a principle of government, Napoleon abandoned republican models in favor of imperial and royal ones, with all their trappings of titles, honors, decorations, and courts.

In an era of rising egalitarian sentiment, the defeated peoples felt their conquest more passionately than they enjoyed their liberation, as the new regime came to resemble the old one more and more. And Zamoyski is simply wrong to say that Napoleon established imperial institutions and mores because those were all the conquered nations understood: He established imperial rule because he ruled as emperor.

For all his military and political genius, for all the pomp and splendor of his reign, Napoleon as Zamoyski presents him is afflicted with what George Eliot called “spots of commonness.” One sees him as a fool in love, a newlywed cuckolded by his first wife, Joséphine; as a serial adulterer himself and perhaps even a rapist; as a pituitary



*A bust depicting Napoleon in the style of Caesar and the other ancient heroes he so admired*

case with a gross paunch and shrunken genitalia; as a loser sunk in dejection after his 1812 Russian fiasco, sulking at dinner and snapping at his (second) wife; as a bored and restive exile on Elba habitually cheating at cards, for which only his mother had the temerity to call him out; and as a writhing mass of pathologies after Waterloo, floundering haplessly when he might have had a chance to gather his forces for a counterblow if he had kept his nerve: “But Napoleon was in a state of shock. ‘What a disaster!’ he had exclaimed to Davout. ‘Oh! My God!’ he cried out with ‘an epileptic laugh’ as he greeted Lavalette.”

Good democrats like their great men cut down to size. Hegel, who had seen Napoleon triumphant at Jena and marveled at the spectacle, writes in *The Philosophy of History* that any schoolmaster can suppose himself a better man than Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great because he has never indulged the immoral craving for conquest and its attendant world-historical fame, but “enjoys life and allows other to enjoy

it too. These psychologists are particularly fond of contemplating those peculiarities that belong to great historical figures as private persons.”

Hegel goes on to cite the proverb that no man is a hero to his valet, and he gives himself credit for having added that this is not because the hero is no hero but rather because the valet is a valet. “Historical personages fare badly in historical literature when served by such psychological valets. These attendants degrade them to their own level, or rather a few degrees below the level of their own morality, these exquisite discerners of spirits.”

Every serious modern biographer has some of the valet about him, and that is a good thing. One may be grateful that it is not some Hegelian epigone writing Napoleon’s life today. Adam Zamoyski has written an honest account of a remarkable man who lived for glory and fell into ignominy. There is no suggestion that Napoleon was the prototype for Hitler. Simply being Napoleon was wickedness enough. ♦

SERGIO ANELLI / ELECTA / MONDADORI PORTFOLIO / GETTY



# Acts of Creation

*Ancient robots and today's intentionally imperfect quest for artificial intelligence.* BY WILLIAM A. WILSON

**T**heir mission accomplished, the weary travelers set out for home across the vast, inhospitable void between civilized worlds. The journey takes longer than expected and, needing supplies, they are forced to land in a strange and remote place. There they come under attack from an ancient, automated defense system: A colossal metal giant, constructed with technology far beyond their ken and programmed to defend the area, bombards their ship. It is implacable, lightning fast, and nearly indestructible—until one of the ship's officers, a master psychologist and artificer, causes the automaton to become self-aware and thereby terrified of its own mortality. The officer then cunningly suggests a procedure supposed to make the metal monster immortal; in fact it deactivates a crucial subsystem. The vast machine collapses, the crew provisions in peace—and Jason and Medea continue their long journey back to Thesaly with the Golden Fleece in hand.

This may seem like an odd retelling of the story of the Argonauts' showdown with Talos on Crete, but if Stanford historian Adrienne Mayor is to be believed, it is close to the original spirit of the story. Greek mythology, she argues in her new book, is an ancient genre of science fiction. And, anticipating the tropes and obsessions of modern s.f., it is littered with stories exploring “the promises and perils of staving off age and death, enhancing mortals' capabilities,

[and artificially] replicating nature.”

That last is the major topic of Mayor's book, because the Greek myths as she tells them are overflowing with robots. Robot sentinels like Talos, ferocious killer robots like the Stymphalian birds, sinister androids like Pandora, robotic assistants like Hephaestus' forge helpers, and on and on. What makes such things robots? Mayor offers two criteria: first, that they

are of mechanical rather than biological construction, and second, that they are the products of conscious artifice. The Greeks, she argues,

envisioned and described these beings as advanced technological artifacts driven by internal machinery and following rational principles of operation. They are not biological and though many of them are created by gods or heroes they are not magical: They are mechanical.

Mayor establishes the engineered nature of androids like Talos and Pandora through a close analysis of pottery fragments depicting their creation. In these, she finds echoes of real historical techniques used in classical sculpture, metal casting, and construction. This also nicely refutes those critics who might claim that artificial life achieved through engineering was an idea beyond the conceptual horizon of the ancients. As do the delightful and zany accounts by ancient travelers of marvelous automata to be found around the Mediterranean—including ones powered by clockwork, hydraulics, pneumatics, and magnetism—with which Mayor peppers her book.

In real life these reached their zenith in Hellenistic Alexandria, and the chapter on these lost marvels is one of the high points of *Gods and Robots*.

**Gods and Robots**  
*Myths, Machines, and  
Ancient Dreams of Technology*  
by Adrienne Mayor  
Princeton, 304 pp., \$29.95

Ptolemy II was said to have commissioned a magnetically levitating nude statue of his wife (who was also his sister). We know this to be a myth, since it runs afoul of Earnshaw's theorem, but the same Ptolemy's “grand procession” was not. Organized in the third century B.C. to honor Dionysus, the parade included dozens of massive automata borne upon floats. Among these was a 12-foot-high seated statue of Nysa, the mythical nursemaid of Dionysus, which, driven by a complex internal mechanism of cams, sprockets, weights, and gear wheels, would periodically stand up from its throne and pour out from a bowl a libation of milk before the flabbergasted spectators.

Less monumental but even more astonishing were some of the tiny automata of Heron of Alexandria, who cheekily advised that a great inventor should make his marvels small so that nobody could suspect that a person was hidden inside. The peak of Heron's craft was a miniature automatic theater that could be “programmed” to display multiple scenes from famous works of drama, complete with fires, sound effects, and dancing statues. With these and other mechanical imitations of nature well known in the ancient Mediterranean, it's hard to believe the concept of robots was unimaginable to them.

**T**he second of Mayor's two descriptive criteria for robots—that they be the products of conscious artifice—may sound vague but is actually by far the more potent. Something that is made is first known completely, inside and out. An artisan or engineer dreams his creation into existence, and then, if all goes well, one day the dream steps into reality. But, as the protagonist of Jorge Luis Borges's short story “The Circular Ruins” realizes, before the dream can have an independent existence it must be perfect. Every detail must be nailed down with precision; the location of every wire or buttress or flange must be specified; the behavior of the creation must be simulated within the mind of the creator so that its every action is predictable.

The knowledge a creator has of his

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*Talos of Crete: a bronze cast of a model made by Ray Harryhausen for the 1963 film Jason and the Argonauts*

creation is simultaneously synoptic and reductive, uncompromising and total. It reminds us of nothing so much as God's knowledge of us. The meaning of the Psalmist's song "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me" cannot be fully comprehended until we too have fashioned something and seen its total vulnerability in our hands and experienced how intimately we know it inside and out. The fact that Adam and Eve were flesh and bone rather than actuators and steel plates does not change this relationship one whit. In fact, this is what makes the whole episode with the fig leaves so darkly hilarious: There is something ridiculous about our first parents' attempt to preserve their modesty from the One who molded their

vertebrae, traced the path of every nerve bundle, wove their tendons, and lovingly layered dermis and epidermis on top of subcutaneous fat.

Since a created thing first takes form within the mind of its creator, it is in some sense a part or an extension of its creator and thus definitionally lesser. Our creations rarely surprise us, and when they do it's either because of a bug in the design or because we were unable or unwilling to simulate its emergent behavior to a high enough degree of fidelity. Our creations also rarely display fundamentally novel abilities that we did not design or program into them. How different the situation is with our children! So much of the joy of parenting is bound up in

the fact that our children are fundamentally unknown to us—little alien intelligences maturing under our eyes, but into what we dare not guess. Our children may be better or worse than we at particular tasks; they may have fundamentally new skills that we never learned or lack entirely abilities we have mastered. But below it all there is a basic equality rooted in the fact that they are not designed, not made by us, not products of our imaginations, not the offspring of our minds—they are beyond our ability to simulate.

By contrast, Mayor repeatedly describes the robots of Greek myth as "made, not born," itself a winking reversal of the "begotten not made" formulation in the Nicene Creed. But if, as she argues, the Mediterranean had been marinating for hundreds of years in stories of gods fabricating superhuman androids, then perhaps the surprising robustness of the Arian heresy—the idea that Jesus was a creation of rather than the son of God, which belief the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) quashed—is easier to understand. The Nicene fathers, most of whom were Greek and doubtless familiar with the old pagan stories, would have understood the temptation of thinking this way. They were trying to differentiate their own dogma from the ancient myths when they underscored the equality between the first two persons of the trinity in describing their relationship as one of "begetting." What is offensive about Arianism is not that it makes Jesus, like Talos, into some kind of robot, but that it makes him lesser. The creed teaches that the Father's priority is "merely" ontological—he is the source of being, including of the two other persons of the trinity, but that's where it ends.

Mayor's two criteria for robotness need not necessarily coincide. Yes, Talos was made and a machine, and our children are begotten and biological. But in the Genesis story Adam was biological, yet very much made. Is there a fourth option? What would it look like to beget something in a nonbiological substance? We needn't look far: It's happening today in the burgeoning field of machine learning.



When inventors are called upon to produce artifacts too complex to be dreamed into existence within a single human mind, they fall back on a few tried and true strategies. One is to commit parts of the design to paper, so that it need not be held in mind in its entirety. Such an approach requires modularity in the artifact: There must be different subcomponents of the design that do not affect or impose on each other too much, so that the inventor can work on the details of one piece without bearing the others fully in mind. If such a modular decomposition is successful, a further step is possible: Different subcomponents can be designed by entirely different people or different teams. In theory, the only knowledge that must be held in common is of the specific boundaries, or interfaces, between subsystems. With techniques like these, teams of human inventors working together have produced technological artifacts vastly more complex than any individual could possibly imagine—and for a time, we thought that artificial life might be next, that through teamwork an entire organization of engineers might finally be able to match the wisdom and skill of Hephaestus. Lately, however, especially in the field of artificial intelligence, this way of thinking has fallen out of favor.

Contemporary techniques of machine learning look very little like the traditional image of an inventor or programmer sitting down to produce an artifact for a purpose and a lot more like trying millions of little experiments in “begetting” until we find one that works. The result of machine learning is something whose internal dynamics, rules of operation, and strengths and weaknesses are unknown and unknowable to us. It is an opaque little intelligence, hyperspecialized for now, that learns, grows in subtlety, and occasionally surprises us. Like our other inventions, we can view every little piece of it in perfect detail, but this time the pieces tell us nothing. My own digital creations frequently surprise me, and sometimes, when they overcome a trial I thought impossible for them or display an aptitude I didn’t

even know they had, I feel a tinge of almost parental pride.

Some artificial intelligence researchers would bristle at this description, pointing out that the high-level architecture of these systems is still the product of human design. (A rough analogy would be to a creator who sketches out a general plan for a body—legs here, arms there, basic structure and arrangement of the organs—and then leaves the details to work themselves out.) That’s true—for now. But the newest trend in the field is to let even these most fundamental properties emerge from optimization, evolution, or some other “organic” process. World-class AI researchers like Andrej Karpathy have gone on the record stating that such “architec-

ture search” is the only feasible short-term path to true intelligence, true artificial minds.

All of this suggests that those critics who disagree with Mayor and argue that the ancient Greeks could not have conceived of robots have it exactly backwards. Mayor is right: The ancient Greeks were *more* than able to conceive of artificial beings that were the product of wisdom and craft. Our best and brightest engineers and scientists today, however, increasingly are not. Artificial intelligence is becoming ever more a misnomer, since it is ever less the product of artifice. And if we succeed in finally realizing it—birthing it, you might say—it will be something unknown, unfamiliar. Something that, like our children, might surprise us. ♦



## Powell's People

*The friends and fights of the Dance to the Music of Time author.* BY CARL ROLLYSON

Authorized biographer Hilary Spurling begins with the assumption that Anthony Powell (1905-2000) deserves his reputation as the English Proust. The work supposed to justify the comparison is Powell’s *A Dance to the Music of Time*. In that 12-volume sequence, he set about to canvass his society from the 1920s to the 1970s, presenting a comprehensive array of character types that has often invited comparison to the flashier Evelyn Waugh. Powell is more subtle than Waugh and sometimes so low-key he has been accused of banality. His work seems so close to life as it is actually lived that certain critics have been staunchly anti-Powell, claiming, essentially, that he is artless. Spurling won’t countenance

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**Anthony Powell**  
*Dancing to the Music of Time*  
by Hilary Spurling  
Knopf, 452 pp., \$35

such debunking, although she dutifully reports the disparaging reviews of heavyweight Powell denigrators like Auberon Waugh, Evelyn’s son.

One surprising aspect of Spurling’s book is the disclosure that not only did Powell draw many of his characters very directly from life—not even assembling them as composites—but that friends and acquaintances for the most part were delighted and began to act like the characters in his books and offer the novelist suggestions about how to represent them. Only on a few occasions did anyone threaten to sue Powell; even then, Powell or others managed to point out aspects of the characters that mollified their real-life models. His work earned

the cooperation even of those he was satirizing because he had the uncanny ability to make his character models believe that he and they shared an important undertaking: the creation of a great novel series depicting a society in which everyone had a vital part to play.

Overall, this biography seems a little complacent, too satisfied with Powell as a good man and great novelist. Spurling does little at the beginning to introduce her subject and to explain why his work is important—failing to acknowledge that novelists are not the major cultural figures they once were. Should her book be regarded as a biography deliberately aimed at a small readership? Perhaps in the United Kingdom, where Spurling's book was first published last year, Powell's work retains a large and lively audience. Surely the situation is different in the United States. To appreciate Spurling's book fully, you would need to know a good deal about English society and have memories of, for example, who Malcolm Muggeridge was and why he became so successful on English and American television and then turned against his friend Powell.

If you don't know the history out of which Powell arises, you won't appreciate that he was a great Tory, which makes his friendships with writers like George Orwell all the more fascinating. Spurling pretty much takes Powell and Orwell's relationship for granted, imparting only a vague admiration for the conservative Powell as a man tolerant of a writer on the left.

And it's not just English society and 20th-century letters that are given short explanatory shrift. Powell decided to go to Hollywood in the early 1930s, supposing he could pick up some of the loot being laid out for screenwriters; Spurling offers no context to understand his failure to attract attention. (You don't go to Hollywood looking for work, as the British filmmaker Ivor Montagu explained in his 1968 book *With Eisenstein in Hollywood*. You have to announce that you are too grand and that you are unavailable, and then Hollywood comes calling.)

In Spurling I miss the wit to be found

in Michael Barber's unauthorized 2004 Powell biography. Barber is a keen commentator on Powell's own volumes of autobiography, which get little attention in Spurling. When Powell writes that he had a "lonely ... but not unhappy" childhood, Barber comments: "It is natural to conclude that ... he may have left something out." As to the surprising affinity between Powell and Orwell, Barber's eye for detail helps. When

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Orwell saw Powell in his World War II full-dress uniform, Orwell, formerly a policeman in Burma, asked, "Do your trousers strap under the boot?" To Orwell's satisfaction he learned they did, and remarked: "Those straps under the feet give you a feeling like nothing else in life." What Powell and Orwell had in common, Barber shows, is a sense of good form. Powell thought Orwell wore "his shabby clothes with style, hinting at the latent dandyism revealed by his comment about the boot straps." Barber capitalizes on Powell's insight into Orwell by including a description of Orwell at Eton (where Powell also went to school) after a swim:

He stands nonchalantly on the bank with his hands in his pockets, a rolled towel under one arm, wearing a floppy sun hat and with an illicit cigarette stuck between his lips. Here, one feels, is another example of the debonair insouciance that made such an impression on Powell.

Authorized biographers have all the archives and interviews coming to

them, and that is why their work sometimes seems under-researched compared with the go-getting unauthorized writers. Barber had no access to the papers that were reserved for Spurling, but he did interview Powell, and Barber develops a style that complements his subject's own wit. To be sure, Spurling adds many new details that amount to a fuller picture of the novelist. And yet the privileges of authorization do not yield a more vivid biography. One reason is that while Spurling knew Powell and could question him, the results, as she admits, were not edifying:

He was perfectly willing to answer whatever I asked, but I was too preoccupied elsewhere to formulate the right questions, or follow them up with anything like professional rigour. Afterwards I had to write and explain that it was impossible for me to think of him in the cold, even clinical light essential for any biographical attempt, and that I couldn't even try to treat him as a subject without establishing some sort of temporal perspective. "I only wish I could give it to you," he wrote sadly in reply.

He was a friend, and in his declining years she was there to buoy him, not study him.

The most moving parts of Spurling's biography deal with Powell's service as a flunky (Spurling's word is "dogsbody") for publisher Gerald Duckworth. Powell's job in publishing, obtained with his father's help, was unfortunately in a firm that, as Spurling puts it, treated books like so many racehorses. If a book or author did not look like a winner, all bets were off. Early on, Powell had a great instinct for important writers and was constantly frustrated because he could not guarantee they would make money for the firm. Even worse, Duckworth hated publishing and seemed to be in business to take his revenge on it. In these hostile and demeaning circumstances Powell labored many a year, eventually turning his experience into one of the great novels about publishing, *What's Become of Waring*.

Spurling is also a splendid guide to the slow, incremental buildup of



Powell's magnum opus. *A Dance to the Music of Time* did not come all at once to Powell, and there were periods when he got stuck and did not know how to go forward. He made a fortunate marriage that proved a constant goad and mainstay, with a wife who knew how to read his books and offer constructive, even severe, criticism that prevented him from ever settling for less than the best he could do. Powell's quiet, steady courage and unwavering dedication to his project make for inspiring reading.

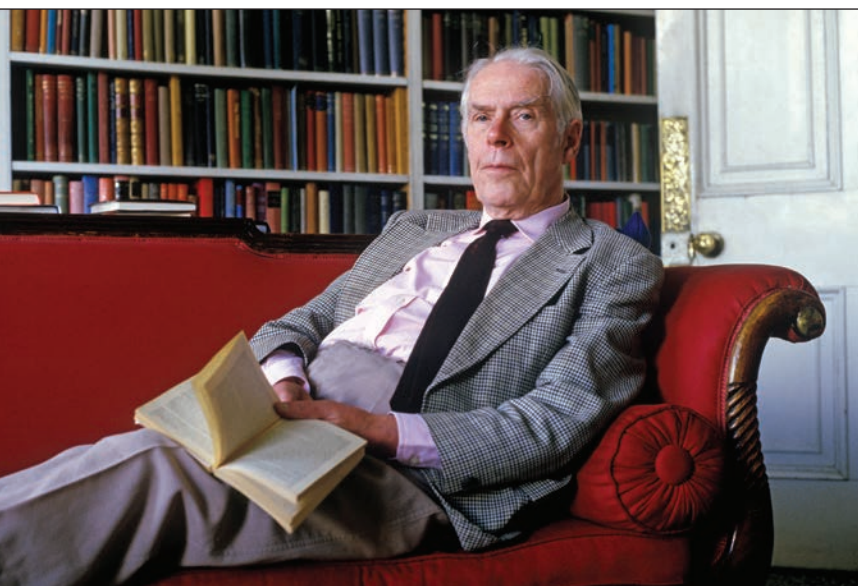
Even if you have never read a Powell novel and know nothing about his great villain Kenneth Widmerpool, Spurling's account of the character's creation will intrigue you. Widmerpool begins his life in the novels as a nonentity, pathetic with women but dogged at making a success of himself in the army and in politics, ultimately securing a life peerage. Here is how Spurling defines him: "Widmerpool has passed into contemporary folklore as the lumbering, initially comical but in later volumes steadily more sinister embodiment of the quest for power that is one of the hinges on which the *Dance* turns." I wish she had said even more. As with so much in Powell's novels and characters, Spurling is always catching them on the fly, never slowing down to explore their significance.

Widmerpool is, in a way, a character for our age as much as for Powell's. He is without a literary sensibility, which means, in Powell's book, no sense of humanity, which is why, alas, he triumphs. More could be made in Spurling's biography of Widmerpool's seemingly innocuous but deadly truncated sensibility. "It doesn't do to read too much," Widmerpool says to Nicholas Jenkins, the narrator. "By all means have some familiarity with the standard authors. I should never raise any objection to that. But it is no good clogging your mind with a lot of trash from modern novels." Even the nod to the classics is perfunctory. If Widmerpool has read much of anything at all, it is not reflected in his words or his character. Powell, even in

the publishing world, felt an estrangement because, with some significant exceptions, not even publishers cared that much about books.

Because Widmerpool has no sense of nobility, no humiliation can set him back. In short, he cannot empathize with others or imagine a world in which all the slights he has endured should diminish his own sense of his superiority. Especially in this charac-

ter, we see that Powell is much more than a chronicler of his times. He understood fascism and its incipient inroads into English culture. Fascists, to begin with, can seem as feckless as Widmerpool at the start, but because they lack any sort of civilized inhibitions, they forge ahead, intent on winning their way at whatever cost to others. Even worse, they believe, like Widmerpool, in their definition of duty and success without any of the qualms or reservations that trouble finer sensibilities.



*Anthony Powell at home in 1987*

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For quite some time, Powell was disparaged as merely a chronicler of the upper classes, a snob who paid no heed to the radical social and political movements of his day. Spurling spends virtually no time defending Powell against this charge—but she does not have to because she is so good at showing how Powell created living characters, visceral, palpable beings,

that readers as choosy as Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis adored.

Powell earns our respect and affection as well because, even better than Barber, Spurling shows how Powell struggled. Duckworth never accorded Powell the respect he deserved, and for much of his career, the critics seemed content to say Powell was not Waugh. Powell persevered while having to crank out copy for *Punch*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and other publications, earning barely enough to live a comfortable life. Financial security eventually came—in part through an inheritance—as did belated accolades for his work. Through it all, with the example of his choleric father to bear in mind, Powell remained almost always calm and determined no matter how humbled circumstances might leave him.

To say Powell played the long game might seem obvious in describing a writer who undertook to write a 12-novel epic, but Powell, as Spurling shows, went ahead not knowing whether he would have the time to complete his grand project. As he labored, his novels and his life came, with some grace, to dance together to the music of time, constantly responding to the vagaries of existence, making the man and his work one and the same. ♦



*La, la, la, la, life goes on: George, John, Ringo, and Paul during their 'mad day out' photo shoot in central London (July 28, 1968) while making The White Album*

BCA

# When They Was Fab

*Fifty years of the marvelous, mixed-up mess that is the Beatles' White Album.* **BY DOMINIC GREEN**

**W**ho broke the Beatles, and when? Some say it was the night when John violated the unspoken code of the Moptops by bringing Yoko to Abbey Road. Others, that it was soon after that, on the night when Yoko, who had been sleeping beneath the mixing desk, emerged to steal one of George Harrison's personal stash of chocolate digestive biscuits, and George, who was the spiritual one, shouted, "You bitch!" Perhaps it was when Ringo, sick of the endless studio jams, bad vibes, and general lack of appreciation, walked out and the others, showing how little they appreciated him, took turns at playing the

*Dominic Green is life and arts editor of Spectator USA.*

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drums. Or was it when Paul forced them to play "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" for three days straight?

All four of those crises occurred at Abbey Road Studios between May and October 1968, while the Beatles were recording *The Beatles*, the double album that they and everyone else came to call *The White Album*. I blame "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da," and not just because reviewing the six CDs and Blu-ray disc of the 50th-anniversary box set of *The White Album* involves hearing Paul's idea of comedy ska in pristine and appalling Dolby True

HD 5.1, alternate takes and all. The creation, recording, and release of "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" represent everything that broke the Beatles. Together with Lennon's sonic collage "Revolution 9," it explains why *The White Album* may well be the best Beatles album and why it has some of the worst Beatles music.

The Beatles would not have been the same without George and Ringo, but they would probably have passed the audition if another guitarist and drummer had played the Quiet One and the Clown. If in doubt, listen to the shows from 1964, when Jimmie Nicol filled in for Ringo, or to Eric Clapton on "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." The Beatles would have been nowhere at all, however, without John and Paul. On *The White Album*, we hear the degree and nature of their collaboration changing in small but powerful ways.

It cannot have helped when John called "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" "granny music s—," any more than it did the following year when Paul looked Yoko in the eye and sang "Get back to where you once belonged." But the group's balance was changed by more than exhaustion or maturation.

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Entertainers who had become artists, the Beatles had to retain the experimental edge of *Sgt. Pepper* without losing the melodic appeal that made them the “toppermost of the poppermost.” The harder they worked, the greater the tension between their artistic and commercial objectives. Meanwhile, the pop business, stimulated by the Beatles’ earlier releases, was also pulling in two directions: toward the illusory authenticities of the folk singer-songwriter and toward the hamfisted virtuosity of hard rock.

Only one of the Beatles had the songwriting chops to compete with the warblers of Laurel Canyon. Only one of the Beatles had the dexterity required by hard rock. Both of them were Paul. By 1968, McCartney, like his Tin Pan Alley heroes, could write a song about anything. And he did, producing complex but trivial songs about a sheepdog with low self-esteem (“Martha My Dear”) and a cuckolded cowboy mammal (“Rocky Raccoon”). The chordal and melodic structure of the Bach-derived “Blackbird” are much more sophisticated than John’s riposte, “Julia.” McCartney, the first Beatle to record solo with “Yesterday” in 1964, could accompany himself too. Drumming on “Back in the U.S.S.R.” after Ringo’s walkout, Paul pastiched Ringo so perfectly that none of the critics or fans noticed. On his guitar solo on that track, Paul makes George sound like he has sausages for fingers.

Success was starting to weigh against the band in other ways. The Beatles would never have got as far as they had without Brian and George. But Brian Epstein had died of an overdose in August 1967. In 1968, they took charge of their own affairs and corporatized themselves into one of the most lauded, least productive, and most expensive fiascos in the history of music, Apple Corps Ltd. Now in their late twenties, and possibly the most famous people in the history of the world, “the boys” were no longer willing to take orders from George Martin. When Martin criticized McCartney’s vocal on “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da,” McCartney snapped back, “Well, you come down and sing it.”

BCA

## Fixing The White Album

The Beatles and George Martin programmed the 93 minutes of *The White Album* for four sides of vinyl and mixed them so that each side of music was continuous. Printing them onto two CDs alters that. So does listening to the 30 tracks as a single sequence of digital files. So does the crowding of our ears with demos and alternate takes. As ever in the history of pop, technology changes the experience. Digital formats are more flexible. In offering *The White Album* in totalized form, the heirs to the Beatles’ estate draw our attention to its many flaws and invite us to improve on it by trimming it with a silver hammer.

*The White Album* is the best Beatles album, but it also contains some of their worst songs. John Lennon knew it when he insulted “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da” in the studio. George Martin recognized it too, but the boys overruled his suggestion that they pick the best songs for a single album. George Harrison came to believe that some of the songs would have been better as B-sides, and that “ego” had got in the way. Only Paul, who didn’t want the noise experiment of “Revolution 9” on the record but insisted on “Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da,” claims that no mistakes were made: “It’s the bloody Beatles’ *White Album*. Shut up!”

Ringo, a master epigrammatist in words as on the skins, got it right. There should have been two single albums, *The White Album* and *The Whiter Album*. There often have been, because arguing over which tracks make the cut and whether the cut is even permissible is a common parlor game among Beatles’ fans. And now, in these formats, there will be even more variations.

The rules of the game are that you

must program less than 45 minutes of music in two vinyl-style halves. John and Paul may sing two lead vocals in a row, because John does on Tracks 2 and 3 of the original album. George and Ringo must have their own vocal features, whether they deserve them or not. No songs recorded at the sessions but released as singles can be added, so “Lady Madonna,” “The Inner Light,” “Hey Jude,” and “Revolution” are out. Neither can songs from these sessions that appeared on later albums, like “Mean Mr. Mustard,” “Polythene Pam,” and “Across the Universe.” Unreleased studio tracks, Esher demos, and alternate takes may be added as wild cards. Eric Clapton may not be disinvented, because he is fated to steal Pattie Boyd from George, but his solo may be edited.

Per those rules, this is my *Right White Album*:

### Side A:

1. “Back in the U.S.S.R.” (Paul, 2:44)
2. “Dear Prudence” (John, 3:55)
3. “Glass Onion” (John, 2:18)
4. “Blackbird” (Paul, 2:18)
5. “Sexy Sadie” (John, 3:15)
6. “While My Guitar Gently Weeps” (George, 4:45)
7. “Everybody’s Got Something to Hide Except Me and My Monkey” (John, 2:25).

**Total: 21:40**

### Side B:

1. “Helter Skelter” (Paul, 4:30)
2. “Mother Nature’s Son” (Paul, 2:48)
3. “Julia” (John, 2:54)
4. “Savoy Truffle” (George, 2:54)
5. “I’m So Tired” (John, 2:03)
6. “Wild Honey Pie” (Paul: 0:53)
7. “Cry Baby Cry” (John: 3:02)
8. “Goodnight” (Ringo: 3:17)

**Total: 22:21**

—Dominic Green

The Beatles' method of composition remained stable in 1968, but not their method of recording. With early exceptions like "She Loves You," Lennon and McCartney usually started writing songs separately and finished them together. In the early days, the band had then arranged and rehearsed the songs in the studio with George Martin supervising. When the band acquired home studios and the experimental itch, the songwriter demoed his song, but the rehearsal process remained stable. Almost all of the songs on *The White Album* were sketched out in this way, in two stages. From February to April 1968, the Beatles went to Rishikesh, India, to meditate with the Maharishi. Between them, Lennon, McCartney, and Harrison wrote about 40 songs. In May 1968, the group recorded rough demos of 27 of them at Harrison's bungalow in Esher, Surrey. Fifteen of these songs were by John Lennon.

The "Esher Demos" have been widely bootlegged, but students of the Beatles' methods will appreciate the restored and clear mixes on this rerelease. It is striking how developed the chords, melodies, and lyrics are, and how clear the primary songwriter's conception is. "Back in the U.S.S.R." is so complete that you notice when McCartney sings "Man, I had an awful flight" (instead of "a dreadful flight"). The electric experiments of Lennon's "Happiness Is a Warm Gun" and "Everybody's Got Something to Hide (Except for Me and My Monkey)" are sketched out in frantic acoustic guitar. And "Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da" is already a Blue Beat stomper.

But when the band went to Abbey Road, they changed their recording process, and not for the first time. Originally, the Beatles had barely used overdubs. By "A Ticket to Ride" (April 1965), they were working up a rhythm track in the studio, recording it quickly to a four-track recorder, then bouncing down tracks to make space for lead vocals and extra instruments and harmonies. Martin's innovation for *Sgt. Pepper*, synching two four-track machines to make an eight-

track, expanded this palette without changing its method.

In 1968, with eight-tracks becoming standard in American studios, EMI bought an eight-track recorder for Abbey Road. But the men in white coats had yet to test and install it in the studio. Now the biggest earners in EMI history, the Beatles surreptitiously moved the new machine to Studio 2 and left the tape running. Instead of rehearsing a backing track and putting it to tape when it was fresh, the band now recorded endless jams, then picked through them to find a rhythm track. Often, they couldn't find one and had to record a fresh rhythm track from scratch. The box set's two "Sessions" discs make melancholy hearing. Exhausted, the Beatles sound like they are covering themselves.

In 1963, recording their first album in a day, the Beatles had nailed "Twist and Shout" in one take. Six years later, they recorded 102 takes of George Harrison's "Not Guilty," only to leave it off *The White Album*. Meanwhile, as the embellishment and overdubbing grew more complicated, the band spread out into two studios, with George Martin's aides Geoff Emerick and Chris Thomas at the controls. The result was the polarization of the Lennon-McCartney collaboration into parallel tracks. Instead of complementing each other by refining each other's compositions, they now wrote antagonistically. The harsher Lennon became, the more sweetly McCartney responded. The result was the kaleidoscopic disorder and variable quality of *The White Album*.

**T**he *White Album* should have been John's rock album, as *Sgt. Pepper* was Paul's psychedelic album. But Paul wasn't zonked on acid in 1968, as John had been in 1967. So a single album of uptight songs that could have brought the aggression and despair of 1968 into focus was blurred by the escapist Pauline indulgences of "Rocky Raccoon," "Why Don't We Do It in the Road?," "Martha My Dear," "Honey Pie," and the song that shall not be mentioned. As Paul gets his way, so John is allowed "Yer

Blues," "Bungalow Bill," and "Revolution 9." And that permits George, whose hit from these sessions, "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," lifts its chords from John's "Dear Prudence," to spread his vocal and compositional talents too thin.

Though Lennon wrote the strongest songs that year, the collaborative high points of *The White Album* are often McCartney's additions to Lennon's songs. You hear the moral decay of "Sexy Sadie" when the slap-back reverb blurs the chromatic descent of McCartney's piano arpeggios. You hear the desire that drives the exhaustion of "I'm So Tired" when McCartney belts out his harmony on the line "I'd give you everything I've got for a little peace of mind." And it is McCartney who holds every group track together, because his final version of the bassline was often one of the last overdubs. When Harrison, in "Savoy Truffle," snipes, "We all know Ob-la-di-bla-da, but can you show me where you are?" he's not referring to McCartney's musical presence.

"The tensions arising in the world around us—and in our own world—had their effect on our music," McCartney writes in his introductory note to the book of the box set, "but the moment we sat down to play, all that vanished and the magic circle within a square that was The Beatles was created." McCartney's memory doesn't match those of George Martin and his team. It seems more plausible that the magic happened despite the tensions.

The Beatles were a great live band, and when they worked together, they were still untouchable. You can hear that on *The White Album*, but you can also hear that the Beatles no longer needed each other in the same ways. *The White Album* contains superb group performances, but it documents the breaking of a quartet into four individuals. All four members play the live rhythm track on only 16 of the 30 *White Album* tracks. The dynamics that built the Beatles were starting to break them apart. The group whose second studio album was called *With the Beatles* could have called its ninth album *Against the Beatles*. ♦



# No Escape from Reality

*Queen pic a surprise hit but unsurprisingly unoriginal.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

**L**ove & Mercy, a superb fictional portrait of Brian Wilson, the presiding genius behind the Beach Boys, was released a few years ago to glowing reviews—and it did no business whatsoever. A few weeks before the release of *Bohemian Rhapsody* on November 2, someone I know in the entertainment business told me the “tracking” on the movie—a measurement of advance excitement that helps predict ticket sales—was surprisingly strong. People really wanted to see this biopic about Freddie Mercury, the golden-throated lead singer of the band Queen.

Like Wilson, Mercury lived a troubled life; unlike Wilson, who found a measure of personal peace and domestic contentment after decades of psychosis, Mercury died at age 45 of AIDS. *Love & Mercy* has a happy ending. *Bohemian Rhapsody* does not. The Beach Boys are a far more revered band than Queen in the annals of pop culture, and Brian Wilson wrote many more classic songs than Mercury. But nobody wanted to see *Love & Mercy*. By contrast, *Bohemian Rhapsody* grossed a jaw-dropping \$51 million in its first weekend—19 percent more than did *A Star Is Born*, which was considered a wild triumph at the box office. What gives?

*Bohemian Rhapsody* is a completely pat, old-fashioned celebrity biopic about an alienated kid who joins a band, battles uncomprehending producers and critics, becomes a huge star, does a lot of drugs, is manipulated by a Machiavellian manager, breaks up

## Bohemian Rhapsody

Directed by Bryan Singer



Rami Malek as Freddie Mercury

the band, does more drugs, realizes his manager is bad, gets back together with the band, finds out he's dying, and performs One Last Great Gig. If you haven't seen it all before, you haven't been much of a moviegoer.

It was entirely clear from the trailers that this was the kind of movie you'd get if you went to *Bohemian Rhapsody*. And it turns out it's exactly the kind of movie people want to see when they go to see a movie about a pop star: rags to riches, gets too big for his britches, suffers a fall, realizes he had it all, makes it right, goes into the great good night.

By contrast, *Love & Mercy* is an innovative and original film that depicts Wilson's descent into madness as he tries and fails to produce an LP masterpiece called *Smile*—and then takes up his story 25 years later as the middle-aged Wilson falls in love with a tough and resourceful woman who

runs afoul of his horrendously controlling therapist, Eugene Landy. Director Bill Pohlad's most brilliant touch was casting two actors to play Wilson (Paul Dano as the young genius and John Cusack as the middle-aged boy-child).

There was nothing pat about *Love & Mercy*, and maybe that's why it did so poorly. It was too fancy. It was too subtle. It was too artistic. People just want to listen to the music and watch the dancing, and there's plenty of both in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, which features a riveting central performance from the TV actor Rami Malek (of *Mr. Robot*), who's so good that after a while you forget the unfortunate prosthetic teeth that make him look less like Freddie Mercury and more like Freddie “the Impaler” Dracula.

I think people wanted to see *Bohemian Rhapsody* not because they worship or revere Mercury or Queen but because they've grown very, very fond of them over the years. Their songs and videos were and are cute, silly, wacky, and giddy, often to the point of stupidity. Queen was, in many ways, the last gasp of camp. Certainly the band's very name was a camp joke commenting on Mercury's mincing personal style, which he undercut with a commanding musical intensity so powerful it could have vibrated right off Luciano Pavarotti's vocal cords.

Over the decades, Queen's songs have come to be beloved in a way no other 1970s Brit-pop band's are because their silliness turned into timelessness. Queen and Mercury are purely lovable now, especially since Mercury's untimely passing in 1991 has frozen him in our memories.

The movie is remarkably and disappointingly free of the playful quality that made Queen singular. Its Freddie is a sad and tortured case, rather than a whip-smart singer-songwriter who understood his great contribution to pop music would come from work that was delightful rather than meaningful.

You want to see a great movie about a pop icon, stream *Love & Mercy*. But you probably won't. And you probably will see *Bohemian Rhapsody*. So much for originality. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD's movie critic.

NICK DELANEY / 20TH CENTURY FOX

right. So doesn't that make you happy?

FOR YOU, ONE DOLLAR

# **'TO WIN THE RACE, YOU MUST EMBRACE'**

*President Trump Just Wants a Hug*

By CHARLOTTE HAWTHORN

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump clarified his statement from last week's contentious press conference, in which he suggested certain Republicans lost their races because they failed to embrace him. "And Barbara Comstock was another," said the president. "I think that she could've won that race, but she did not want to have the embrace." He later added, "Peter Roskam did not want the embrace" and "Erik Paulsen did not want the embrace."

The president now says he's been misunderstood. "We can have disagreements over policy," Mr. Trump told RT America. "I get that, and every district is different. What I'm talking about is an actual physical embrace. I've been told I'm very good at embracing people—not too tight, not too limp, just right. And who doesn't want a warm hug, especially these days?"

Mr. Trump then pointed to last week's Republican winners. "Josh Hawley, Kevin Cramer, Ron DeSantis, they all embraced me warmly," said the president. As for Texas senator Ted Cruz: "Ted was reluctant at first, but I told him, 'Ted, you're neck and neck with Beto. What you need is my embrace.'" Mr. Trump said Mr. Cruz was finally overcome by the desire to win. "So that happened. I didn't linger, just a few seconds. He wears too much aftershave—I smelled like Aqua Velva all



Donald Trump and Ted Cruz embrace.

day. But guess what? He got reelected."

Mr. Trump said his new catchphrase is "To win the race, you must embrace."

Other elected officials, the president claims, were not so fortunate. "Mia Love, Erik Paulsen, Peter Roskam, Mike Coffman, Carlos Curbelo, they all paid a price for refusing my warm embrace." The president then went further, adding, "Miss February 1983, Miss April 1985, my high school math teacher, the T.A. for my microeconomics course at Wharton, the Sun-Maid Raisin Girl, Attorney General Jeff

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## **White House Enforces New Limits on Reporters at Press Conferences**

*Microphones Attached to Cattle Prods*